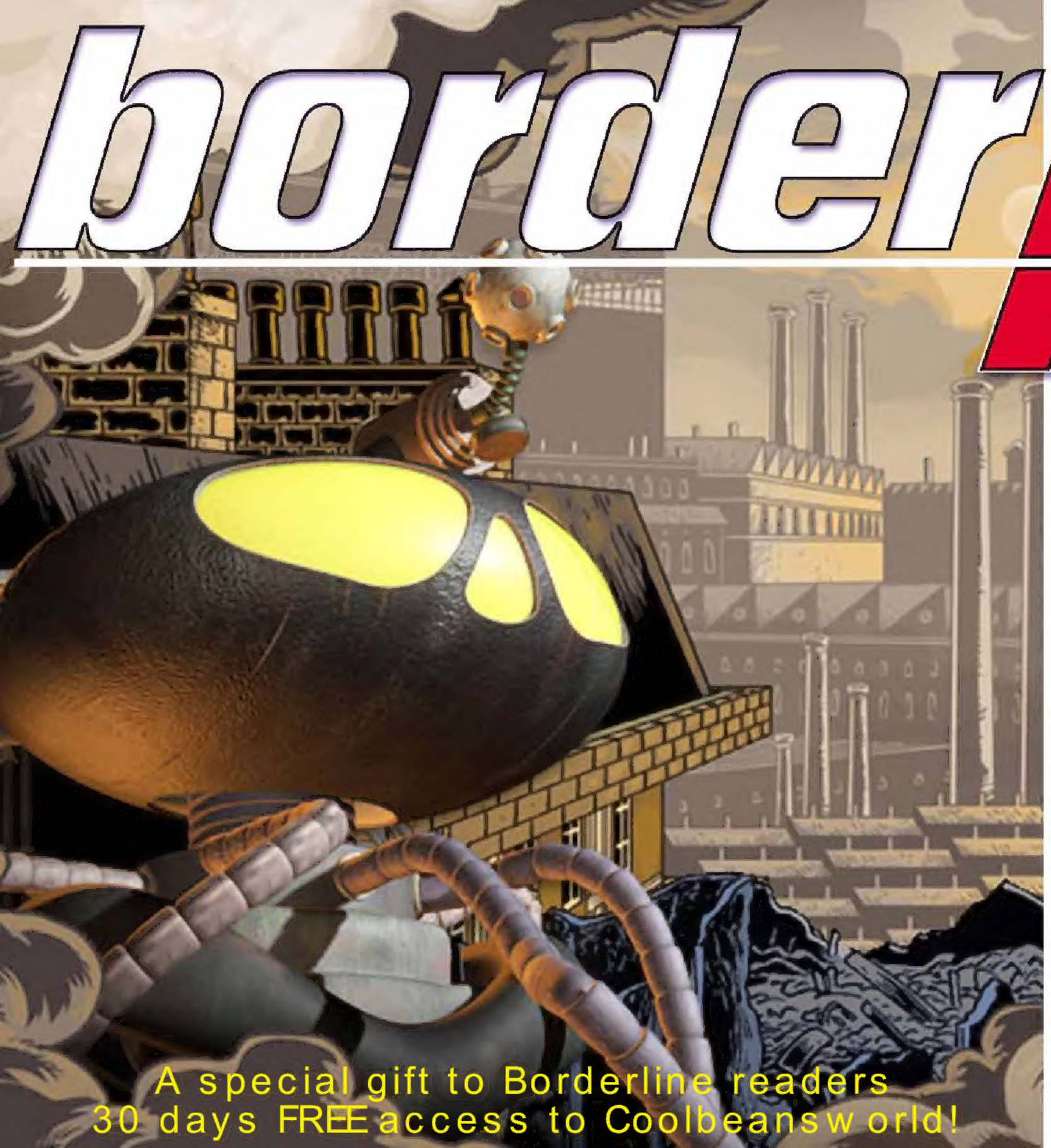
borderline

THE Comics Magazine

March #8



A special gift to Borderline readers
30 days FREE access to Coolbeansworld!

In this issue:

Interviews with:

Alejandro Jodorowsky
Simon Furman
Dean Haspiel

Features on:

Cool Beans World
John Carnell
Angoulême 2002
Ralf König
Rex Mundi
Mike Worley
Deodato's Tigra
Steve Ditko

PEANUTS HARDCOVERS TO BE WON!

Columns · Reviews
News · Views
Small Press

To make your enjoyment of Borderline an even easier experience, follow the simple point and click instructions: All contents have an internal link, allowing you to click on them and be taken automatically to that page. The Globe symbol at the bottom right of each page will take you back to the contents page.

There are also hyperlinks throughout Borderline enabling you to link directly with stories, websites and points of interest on the internet.

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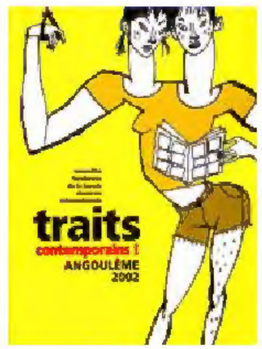

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THE COMICS MAGAZINE

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This month's kudos go to Dan Whitehead, Pete Ashton, Shawna Ervin-Gore, Ian Sattler, Andy, Dèo, Paul Gravett and the WEF. Cover design by the almost alien loveliness that is Jim Campbell, Art by Matt Brooker t/a D'Israeli – A different kind of Mars bar!

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INDUSTRY STANDARD

Phil Hall puts the US industry into perspective...

PREJUDICE: it exists everywhere and most of us are guilty of it or have been at some point in our lives. Prejudice isn't just about sneeringly calling someone "black" or "gay" or saying "well, you're a woman, you can't do it!", it's the general dismissal of *anything*, presumably by people who either don't understand, or more importantly don't *want* to understand. Seven months ago, I was a dyed in the wool American superhero comics crumblie and part of my game plan for Borderline was to give superhero comics the same kind of serious coverage that The Comics Journal gives to everything else.

Then, about two months ago, my production editor, Mike Kidson, and I were talking about the "comics industry" and he said something that caused me to have an epiphany of sorts: "Quit thinking of the comics industry as Marvel and DC. In the grand scheme of things, Marvel is two guys in a garage with a photocopier." And the weird thing is that I, as much as anyone, have been illustrating this point in this magazine for the last six months. I still find it difficult to comprehend that Amazing Spider-Man sells 100,000 copies a month and Marvel is crowing about it like it's something to be proud of, and yet Monica's Gang, produced in Brazil by Mauricio de Sousa Productions and independently sells 3½ million copies – per week!

Marvel is two guys in a garage with a photocopier.

There are those of you out there who will point to economic factors, such as the cost of living in South America, but the hard truth is the comicbook, as a serious artform, is embraced almost everywhere in the world apart from the USA and UK.

Another hard truth is that a comic is deemed a failure in Japan and South East Asia if it sells less than half a million copies – despite the fact that manga is printed in black and white on cheap newsprint and *still*, inch for inch, costs more than American comicbooks. This sort of puts Marvel's hyperbole into some context.

There are an estimated one million comics readers in the United States! How on earth do they come up with these figures? If there are a million US comics readers, how come the best selling title is only doing just over 100,000? Where are the other readers / collectors, and just what are they reading? Over 600 titles were solicited in January and, being as fair as I can, to reach one million, the 100,000+ readers of Amazing Spider-Man would have to be different people from the 60,000+ readers of Peter Parker, Spider-Man. Now, how likely is that? It would probably be fair to say that there are about 250,000 comic readers in the USA, and that's still a liberal minded estimate.

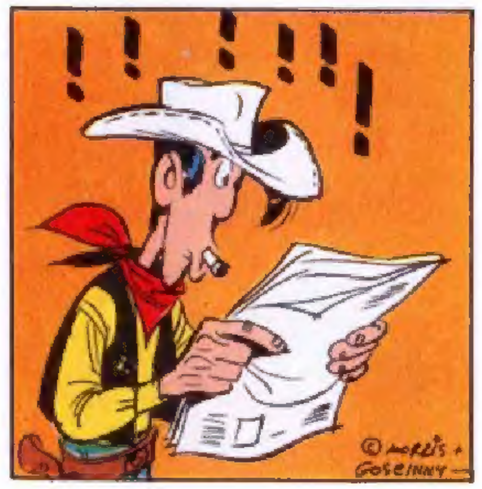
[US sales] represent 2% of the total world sales

It's easy to think of US comics fans (specifically Marvel and DC fans) in the same light as Born Again Christians. They are right! They know best! They are preaching the word of the one true God and all others are false idols peddling blasphemy and products that have evolved in Satan's armpit. This is prejudice... And Borderline's aim from the beginning was to educate, elucidate and above all entertain, and definitely not set one aspect or genre above any of the others (shame the same can't be said of either the US industry or the specific divisions of US fandom).

I *do* know that most comic fans accept that there's more to life than spandex; and I *can* understand why many fans of that specific small part of the medium are so determined to remain focussed exclusively on superheroes. What I can't understand is the prejudice that comes from superhero die-hards and is aimed at anyone who doesn't want to sit and discuss a Gerry Conway run on Spider-Man or the drop in quality in Batman when Dick Dillin took over from Neal Adams or whether or not Al Simmons's wife will ever discover the truth about Spawn, or whatever... Superhero fans believe that this is it - there is nothing else worth even considering. The "If it ain't spandex it ain't sitting in my comic box" mentality is rife; what's worse is that it is so partisan and intense that people actually get the impression that the American superhero industry is the market leader, when in truth it represents perhaps 2% of the total world comic sales. 2%! Wow, that much?

Because there *is* a huge gap in sales between Spider-Man and, say, Carla Speed MacNeil's Finder, you could argue that there's little point in publicising such incredibly marginal comics. But comics that don't actually concentrate on spandex clad heroes are the norm for the rest of the world. 90% of total comics sales in the world haven't got a "conventional" US-styled superhero in sight. They have heroes - but for many Anglophone fans even comics such as Lucky Luke, Asterix or Tintin may fall into the "foreign garbage" category. They may be three of the biggest selling comics in the history of the medium, but where are the muscles?

Of course, it could be a matter of aesthetics. US superhero comic fans have always been treated to the best artwork money can buy, haven't they? It's all very pretty compared to all that small press nonsense or that foreign garbage, isn't it? If you agree that those are questions and not statements, keep on reading Borderline. You may just find some answers to them. As an Internet-delivered magazine it isn't commercially bounded by the parochial outlook imposed on print publications by world distribution costs. Nor is its editorial view. BL



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NICK AND THE BEANSTALK

COOL BEANS WORLD

Something wonderful is taking shape in Sheffield and Jay Eales traded some Cool magic Beans to discover what was happening in this brave new World...

THIS month Borderline, in association with Cool Beans Productions, is extending a very special offer to all our readers: a month's free access to Cool Beans World!

This offer allows you access to some of the biggest names in the comics industry, either reviving classic stories from their back catalogue, or creating new works making the most of the electronic format to enhance the experience for the reader, from animated sequences to sound effects and more.

Just click on the box below and follow the instructions to discover a whole new world of comics and the internet...

EXCLUSIVE TO BORDERLINE
FREE TRIAL SUBSCRIPTION TO
WWW.COOLBEANSWORLD.COM

COOL BEANS WORLD is something new and special - a showcase that allows some of the biggest names in the comics industry to revive classic stories from their back catalogue, and to create new works making the most of the electronic format to enhance the experience for the reader, from animated sequences to sound effects and more.

Borderline spoke to Cool Beans founder Nick Percival, and asked what it was that motivated him to start the enterprise. "We'd been developing a lot of technology and different storytelling ideas at Cool Beans for a long time anyway, especially as we've been heavily involved in the development of computer animation, consistently with comic book style characters and storylines. Having worked in the comic book industry both professionally and in retail, Cool Beans World was basically the accumulation of a lot of ideas that we wanted to test and develop, and what better way than get some of the best professionals in the comics industry on board and working with us?

"Comics are cool, and we wanted to do something to emphasize that fact, and yet still put a unique spin on things. It was a question of taking the comic strip medium further by adding animation, sound, special effects, etc that gave the creators involved a real kick, as they were pretty much working on mini-movies (Dark Frankenstein, Scarlet Traces, computer animated Marshal Law, Dr. Krieger, etc). The Internet was a logical first outlet for this.

"It's still very early days for Cool Beans World and we're continually looking at ways to improve it and see how it can evolve. Ironically, as a result of exposure on the site, a couple of the titles are in development as animated TV series, and we have a number of deals on the table to reprint some of the original comic material as graphic novels, so it's sort of come full circle."

One of the heavy hitters of Cool Beans World is undoubtedly Marshal Law, legendary hero-hunter, created by Pat Mills and Kev O'Neill. Borderline asked Mills how he became involved with Cool Beans: "I wrote a screenplay for Saintly - one of their key characters," he said, adding, "They needed a writer and I guess they thought I was suited for it. Occult is right up my street."

Kev O'Neill spoke of the appeal for him of Cool Beans World: "Cool Beans World is a spectacular arena for the more eclectic and darker worlds of comics and CGI, a network for kindred spirits who don't take sugar and want to get their hands dirty. It will be fascinating to see a new visual grammar develop to embrace the frankly boggling technology both available and in development. A few pioneers may end up in Boot-Up Hill, but doubtless we will mourn their loss for a nanosecond before the next adventure capitalist shows us the way. So stay away from any uncool worlds and spread the one true law."

Simon Davis, probably best known for his work on 2000AD's *Sinister Dexter*, told Borderline how he was recruited. "If memory serves me correctly, I was contacted by Nick Percival via Pat Mills, who told me what was planned in the way of an Internet comics site, and that he had a project that, knowing my tastes in 'traditional' horror stories, would be suited to me. It turned out to be Dark Frankenstein, written by Ian Edginton. I started off doing roughs of the main characters and then moved on to the story proper, and it's proving great fun to do. The great thing about working for Cool Beans World

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is that artists are given stories that they have a real enthusiasm for, and this definitely shows in the finished product. I even had a chance to do a couple of oil paintings too."

D'Israeli, aka Matt Brooker, explained his involvement: "It was through the writer Ian Edginton; CBW had contacted him about reprinting an old story he'd done with Dean Ormston, Bug Hunt. They were also interested in any other unpublished/ lapsed material he might have, and he suggested Kingdom Of The Wicked, a graphic novel project he'd done with me in 1993."

Ian Edginton expanded on the subject: "Kingdom Of The Wicked came out from Caliber initially, but it was Tundra UK that commissioned it, but they folded. We had all the artwork, and it was in full colour, glorious stuff. Nick wanted to put it on the site, with music and animated dissolves. Then he asked me if I'd like to work on one of the corporate things, the properties that they owned, which was called Dark Frankenstein, a gothic horror thing, with Simon Davis, who I really liked on [2000AD's] *Snister Dexter*. That's the early generation, and we've got a next generation of stuff in the works."

Borderline asked some of the creators whether they felt that outlets like Cool Beans World would be likely to help or hinder the possibilities of future reprints of the material by traditional paper publishers. Pat Mills suggested, "Any expansion of the media is healthy."

Simon Davis said: "I see the two working quite nicely together. It has to be faced that luddites like me will always think fondly of the days of a rolled up comic in your back pocket next to your catapult and bubblegum, but things do change and the technology is very exciting. The new audience of groovy teenagers are used to spending time looking at a screen with games, etc, so I suppose to them it's no big deal looking at comics online. At the beginning, it was hard for me to understand that, but I just had to realise that things do change, and it usually brings a breath of fresh air with it, and new possibilities. But, on the other hand, 'paper' comics and collections will always be popular, as there is an immediacy about reading them that is hard to beat, so I don't think publishers should be afraid of republishing internet material at all; it's a whole different audience. The use of comics on the internet also allows a story to slowburn and create a big fanbase without the worries of publishing and distribution costs, which is the factor which usually makes or breaks a new comic."

D'Israeli concurred, saying: "The truth of this is, no-one really knows; most of the people I talk to about CBW ask if there will be print versions of the comics too, which suggests that the web version might help stimulate sales of physical comics in the same way that Napster helped boost sales of albums. People still want that physical object. There has been some small interest (from a US publisher who shall remain nameless) in another print version of Kingdom Of The Wicked since it went up on the Cool Beans website, but the economics of print production meant it having to be in black & white, plus the reprint fee was very low, so we decided to pass. I suspect the financial risk of putting out a 96-page graphic novel containing no major copyright characters was probably more off-putting to the publisher than whether or not the material had appeared on CBW."

Ian Edginton has a differing viewpoint towards trade paperbacks. "The big bulk of trade paperbacks are basically a big waste of trees. They're put out specifically for bookstores. They're not aimed for comic stores, but for the non-comics reader who'll pick up anything like Spider-Man or Batman, irrespective of whether it's any good. The titles I like, such as Mister X, which came out from Vortex in the 80s - the first four issues were done by Jaime Hernandez, and after that it was like, Dean Motter and various other artists. Really stylish – good comics. And they're not hot

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comics but they're scarce; you can't find them. It would be nice if someone could get hold of them so people could see them again. With Kingdom Of The Wicked, there was a lot of hype about it when Tundra UK were promoting it, but then nothing really happened, so it's nice to see it online and in colour. For all those people who thought it was black and white, it looks new, because they're seeing it in colour for the first time.

Asked what appealed to him about computer animation, and the suitability of his own projects for the medium, Kev O'Neill replied, "I tried convincing movie producers several years ago to pursue the idea of an animated Marshal Law feature, but they had their heart set on live action. Computer animation seems to bridge both cel animation and live action, creating an uber-reality beautifully suited to Marshal Law. He, and the supporting cast, look like their comic book counterparts while glowing in a crisp, sharp life of their own. Virtually every comic book movie has compromised its source material, usually to wind up being either camp, dull or ridiculous - ironic in some cases as, in the often long history of transferring comic book features to film, screenwriters tend to gravitate to the camp or ridiculous elements. Yet *Mad Max*, *Terminator*, *Aliens* and *Die Hard* all seem to breathe from comic book lungs, and are not directly sourced from comics. Comic book gravitas can work. It takes a little faith, and a lot of style. Computer animation offers comics creators their greatest opportunity for direct creative involvement when crossing over into another media form with their characters, so I have no fear and loathing of CGI!" Pat Mills answered the same question thus: "It's the DVD of comics. It's adding so much more - voice, lighting, SFX. Previously, so many projects I've been involved with have been limited by bad distribution, restricted audience, poor paper, printing or constraints of page size and length. Suddenly, with one stroke, all these problems disappear. Usually there is a wide gulf between comics and animation and movies. Cyber comics and animation closes the gap. I think we're at a very early stage on this; the long term implications are enormous."

D'Israeli explained the nature of his involvement in the process of tailoring his work for the web. "Our current project, Scarlet Traces, contains limited animation, plus a simple soundtrack and the odd sound effect. Ian Edginton specifies most of the animated effects in the script. I then work out exactly how the animation will apply in the page, and produce the pages in

SCARLET TRACES
BY IAN EDGINTON AND D'ISRAELI

Scarlet Traces takes place a decade after the events in H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*. The industrious Victorians have assimilated the Martian technology into their everyday lives.

The First and Second World Wars do not happen, and the terrible Martian Heat-ray has assured the dominance of the British Empire.

Meanwhile, in London, police are baffled by bodies found, drained of blood...

MARSHAL LAW
BY PAT MILLS AND KEV O'NEILL
(ANIMATIONS BY COOL BEANS PRODS)

After The Big One destroyed San Francisco... After the war in The Zone ended in stalemate... After the Super Heroes came home... Marshal Law is a licensed vigilante operating out of San Futuro. He specialises in hunting down superheroes - the super-powered beings of the near future, who claim to be the guardians of humanity. But the Marshal recognises them for the frauds they really are. When they use their powers to terrorise the public, he's sent in to deal with them; a job he performs with the utmost relish and expertise.

Marshal Law's hatred of superheroes reflects his own self-loathing, for he was once a superhero too; a veteran of The Zone, the war in South America for which the heroes were first deployed. Thanks to bio-electronic spinal implants, these genetically engineered soldiers no longer felt pain, and thus became men without fear; unfeeling, and capable of any atrocity...

THE TWISTED MIND OF DR. KRIEGER
BY PAT MILLS & COOL BEANS PRODS

Over 120 years old, Dr Emil Krieger is a twisted genius, with an unhealthy interest in the actor David Hasselhoff. Some call him insane, but Krieger is a true visionary, as pages from his secret journals and documents will reveal.

His experiments in super-genetics and probing of the human psyche have shocked the scientific community.

Located deep within a military bunker, cut off from the outside world, Krieger schemes and plans experiments so extraordinary, so unique and so dangerous that only his superior intellect can truly grasp the importance of his discoveries. Bear witness to the results of his labours: test subjects such as the man-ape Krong, the mysterious patient dubbed Project X and a serial killer, the Bad Shepherd.

His military employers believe that they have him under control. They don't. They never have.

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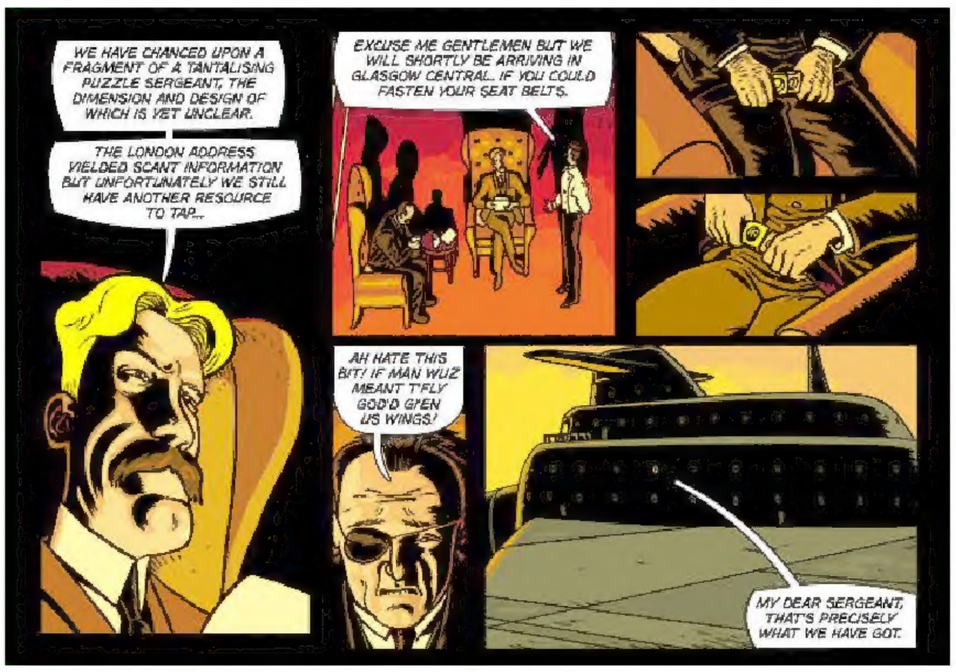
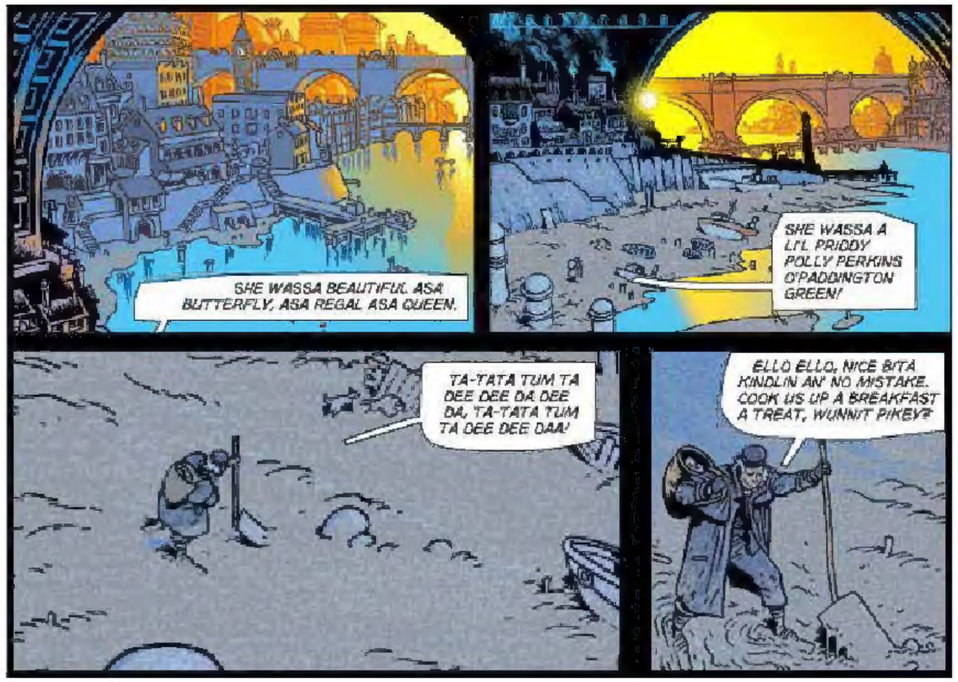
layers with the animated elements as separate objects. I send those in along with a storyboard showing how stuff is supposed to work. At Cool Beans there's a very patient lady called Lynn who actually knits it all together into animation. She pretty much controls the soundtrack. Every so often, Ian and I visit Cool Beans, to give feedback on the animation. So we're fairly closely involved in the process, though the actual animation programs are like black magic to me." Simon Davis opts for a simpler life: "When I hand over my artwork, they're still hand-painted A3 pages. I make notes on them to suggest the animations to use, i.e. snowfall, blood dripping, etc, but generally, I leave CBW to it. They know what they're doing. It's Marcus at CBW who handles the Dark Frankenstein story, and he's done a brilliant job on it, and hopefully he enjoys doing it as much as me!"

Ian Edginton added, "Not tub-thumping for Cool Beans exactly, but I do think you get quite decent value for money on the site, with the games, the screensavers and all the stuff in the archives. From my point of view, it's been interesting to watch the progression of it, from Kingdom Of The Wicked, which was an existing thing that they'd put music to and added special effects; they'd jazzed up a comics story. Then with Dark Frankenstein, I've put in audio and visual effects I'd like, and the guys there, who know how to manipulate the media better than me, have done other things as well. The next thing they're talking about is motion capture, and proper dubbed voices. For Wrestling Wars they've done CGI trailers featuring some of the characters – fully computer generated animations, and it's like... wow! In the year to eighteen months I've been working with them, I've seen the technology and the advancement in what they can do grow exponentially."

Borderline asked Mills, Davis, D'Israeli, Edginton and Simon Bisley about their upcoming work for CBW. Davis and Mills are collaborating on SIN, a project wreathed in secrecy. Davis would only say that: "There's an original story I'm developing with Pat Mills, titled SIN, which I'm really excited about, and should utilise the animation side of CBW to the full." Mills was equally evasive; "Simon Davis came up with a great fantasy idea about paintings and asked me if I wanted to put a story together with him. Because the story is still developing, and is some long way off appearing, I shouldn't really say too much about it. Also, my experience elsewhere is that there are so many hungry hacks out there who seem to enjoy feeding off my stories rather than creating their own, I don't want to give them a free lunch."

D'Israeli seems to be continuing his series of collaborations with Ian Edginton with Scarlet Traces, followed by "Another project in the works called Leviathan. While Scarlet Traces is basically just a comic on the web, Leviathan will take into account what we've learnt while working for the web, and will probably have as much in common with computer game interfaces as traditional comics."


WE HAVE CHANCED UPON A FRAGMENT OF A TANTALISING PUZZLE SERGEANT, THE DIMENSION AND DESIGN OF WHICH IS YET UNCLEAR.
THE LONDON ADDRESS YIELDED SCANT INFORMATION BUT UNFORTUNATELY WE STILL HAVE ANOTHER RESOURCE TO TAP...
EXCUSE ME GENTLEMEN BUT WE WILL SHORTLY BE ARRIVING IN GLASGOW CENTRAL. IF YOU COULD FASTEN YOUR SEAT BELTS.
AH HATE THIS BIT! IF MAN WUZ MEANT T'FLY GOD'D GIEN US WINGS!
MY DEAR SERGEANT, THAT'S PRECISELY WHAT WE HAVE GOT.


SHE WASSA BEAUTIFUL ASA BUTTERFLY, ASA REGAL ASA QUEEN.
SHE WASSA A LI'L PRIDDY POLLY PERKINS O'PADDINGTON GREEN!
TA-TATA TUM TA DEE DEE DA DEE DA, TA-TATA TUM TA DEE DEE DAA!
ELLO ELLO, NICE BITA KINDLIN AN' NO MISTAKE. COOK US UP A BREAKFAST A TREAT, WUNNIT PIKEY?

Concerning Scarlet Traces, Ian Edginton commented, "Scarlet Traces is a sequel to *War Of The Worlds*. Matt [D'Israeli] has put in hours above and beyond the call of duty with the amount of work he puts in, but I think it shows;

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it's on the screen; the pans and dissolves; it just looks astonishing. There's an opening pan of London from the Thames Embankment, and it just sweeps across and you can hear the Martian War Machine calling, and it's just so cool."

Simon Bisley spoke about his involvement with Cool Beans, and his two new upcoming projects: Wrestling Wars, written by Ian Edginton, and Doomkeeper, written by Alan Grant. "They're a very talented bunch of guys. They know what they're doing and have some good stuff up there. Nick's a talented young artist in his own right, so that helps. It's all going the way of the computer now anyway, isn't it? There aren't any constraints at all with this. It's the first time I've really put so much of my input into making the animation as close to my illustrations as possible. So it will be interesting to see the results." Bisley's enthusiasm for the Wrestling Wars project seems to head into method-acting territory, if he is to be believed: "This is so cool. I've done a fair amount of comic strip stuff for this. There are ten characters, and I've done an origin story for each. These guys are mental. You've got fellas like Kid Raptor, who's half boy, half Raptor - really brutal characters. It's really over the top stuff. Some of my best line artwork as well – nice tight pencils and inks. That's being coloured at Cool Beans. The animation done so far is totally awesome. Wrestling Wars is gonna be a comic, but they're also working on a TV show of it. Full computer animation. The stuff I've seen from Cool Beans on this is bang on. I know a lot of wrestlers, and we're thinking about getting some costumes made up, and having some Wrestling Wars bouts with these other guys. It should be a good laugh." The other major project Bisley is working on at present for Cool Beans is Doomkeeper. "The paintings I've done for Doomkeeper are some of my best work. Big, huge things. I think Cool Beans are gonna do them as posters. I've done a set of storyboards, 'cause this'll eventually be animated as well. Alan Grant has written some of the episodes, but I've not started painting it yet. It's gonna be

SAINTLY

Jediah T. Kane *"Satan with a Southern drawl?"*
A demon with a terrible and secret past has had his eyes fixed on the small town of Saintly for generations. Hiding in the shadows and places not meant for humans, Jediah is quietly building an army of... *things*. When people start so mysteriously disappear from the town, his dark agenda begins. He knows their secrets, their desires, their fears. Soon it will be time...

Old Gimpy *"Go ahead. Call me crazy. I seen things ya won't believe!"*
Seen by the residents of Saintly as a harmless, comical old tramp, Old Gimpy lives on the outskirts of the town, on Stalk Hill, employed out of sympathy as the local gravedigger. Is his talk of demon clowns that ate his hand, and creatures that live in the woods, nothing more than the drunken ramblings of an old man? And what secrets does he know from Saintly's past?

Pug Mackenzie *"Gee Mom. This is going to be the coolest!"*
School whiz kid and wit, Pug sets out to impress his friends with the neatest Halloween costume Saintly will see this year. Happy-go-lucky,but reckless, for Pug Halloween is his favourite time of year. But could Pug's love for everything to do with horror one day land him in trouble?

Mary Lou Baxter *"It's a girl thing, doofus!"*
Smart and opinionated, with a keen baseball pitching hand, Mary Lou hangs out with Pug, Porky and Mr Buggs, her toy bunny. Her family have lived in Saintly for generations, but why do her parents go quiet when she mentions the gravedigger on Stalk Hill? And did Mr Buggs just wink at her a moment ago?

Todd 'Porky' Biggs *"You gonna eat that?"*
Loyal friend of Pug and Mary Lou, Porky's love of all things edible often makes him the butt of school pranks and insults. Porky knows it's what's on the inside that counts. And we all know he has a big warm heart inside!

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another epic, though. Real hardcore, gritty sword & sorcery stuff, but still set in the real world. I'm painting realistic backgrounds and stuff to go with it. This is probably gonna take longer to do than Wrestling Wars."

Borderline suggested to Nick Percival that CBW takes the first steps in bridging comics, animation and games, and asked where he thought it might lead. "I think all of those three mediums will still remain separate. The static comic book is still best read from a physical copy you can take anywhere; the animated comic book works well on the web, and games are a whole interactive experience. Having said that, we've done some test work on an animated interactive comic strip that has a great potential - it's a lot of work for the writer, as the storyline can take many different twists and turns, and you still have to keep a consistent narrative, but this would be a truly unique form of storytelling, that is backed up by all the things that make good comics so cool: strong plotline, compelling characters and great visuals." Asked about the possibility of interactive material featured on CBW being made available commercially at a later date, Percival told us: "We are looking at creating DVD-style compilations of the animated and enhanced material that would include a ton of extras, such as all the behind the scenes stuff, etc. This is certainly fairly easy for us to do in house. Dark Frankenstein would probably be the first of these, and we'd replace word balloons with spoken dialogue and extra animation would be included. It should be pretty cool."

COOL BEANS WORLD
COMING SOON
COMICS ZONE
INTERACTIVE ZONE
DOWNLOAD ZONE
COMMUNITY ZONE
SHOP ZONE
CALL HOST
LOG OUT
KINGDOM OF THE WICKED
GREAT DICTATOR
The Great Dictator plays by his own rules - conquest and death!
And what is his sinister connection to author, Christopher Grahame?
"I know a place where darkness lives. A place of boiling metal and anguished flesh. Where a nauseous miasma of hot iron and blood hangs heavy in the air.
This is where the wild things are... where bad dreams ferment.
This is hell... this is my home... and I'm expecting company."
Chris Grahame
Capt. Flashheart
Great Dictator
Characters
KINGDOM OF THE WICKED
CURRENT EPISODES
CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES
BEHIND THE SCENES
COMING SOON
COMIC ARCHIVE
OTHER TITLES
DR. KREEGER
IN THE HILLS, THE CITIES
MANADA
MARSHAL LAW
SAINTLY
SOMEPLACE STRANGE

COMING ATTRACTIONS

ACID SENTENCE

The Deadstock Correctional Facility... Home to the most violent, mutated and insane felons the world of 2067 has ever known.

Time for a new arrival - Daniel Blackborn. Sentenced for death by electrocution, Daniel has one thing on his warped mind:

Kill them all - every last one of them.

From the pen and brush of the bad boy of urban horror, John Hicklenton, comes a series of dark humour, cool carnage and wasps - lots of wasps.

THE BANDY MAN

From the creative team of the X-Files comic series - Stefan Petrucha, Miran Kim and Charlie Adlard - with the addition of Scary Godmother creator Jill Thompson.

The Bandy Man is a soulless being that has walked the earth for the duration of man's existence. Only a whisper lingers from those who have come across him.

A tale of God's first and unfinished creation.

BLASTED!

The place: Lost Vegas. The year: 3054.

When two brothers stumble across the ultimate weapon in a second hand store, their lives take a violent turn for the worse.

Cops, mutants, robots and criminals want their hands on this weapon known as the Blaster and nothing will get in their way.

Written and illustrated by the manic Uwe De Witt, Blasted! kicks you where it hurts and doesn't stop.

DOOMKEEPER

An engine of unstoppable destruction, this ancient warrior appears at the darkest of times to fulfil a personal vendetta sparked at the dawn of time.

Legendary illustrator Simon Bisley invades Cool Beans World with his most stunning creation to date.

DoomKeeper is an ongoing painted and computer animated epic that is set to break the boundaries of graphic storytelling.

MARSHAL LAW - SECRET TRIBUNAL

Writer Pat Mills and artist Kevin O'Neill deliver another heavy dose of pulse-pounding, monster-fragging, nightstick-swinging, gun-blazing action as Marshal Law, the original comic book anti-hero, has to stop disgusting extraterrestrials from gobbling up pubescent members of the League of Superheroes.

COOL BEANS CLASSIC: NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD

Locked in a farm house, you hear them scratching at the door. They keep coming, with one intention... to feed on your flesh. You are down to your last rifle rounds. What do you do? Save one for yourself?

Their incessant murmurs and groans are driving you crazy as they try to force the door. The wooden frame splinters. Your fingers tighten, ready around the trigger. This is the worst night of your life. This is the *Night of the Living Dead*.

Director George A. Romero's classic horror takes you on a journey to the edge filled with suspense, action and terror.

LANCE BARNES: POST NUKE DICK

If nuclear armageddon wasn't enough to rain on your parade, try being responsible for starting it!?!

But that's just another day for Lance Barnes: Post Nuke Dick.

From writer Stefan Petrucha (The Bandy Man & X-Files comic series) and illustrator Barry Crain comes a wise-cracking gumshoe making his way through the post-atomic badlands of phreaks, geeks, psychos and mutie mutts.

Aided by his faithful one-legged sexy assistant Peg, Lance wants to know,

"Which is worse: accidentally ending the civilised world? Or running out of cigarettes?"

WRESTLING WARS

Cool Beans and Simon Bisley reunite to bring you the ultimate sporting experience.

To be presented in bone crushing computer-animated Bisley 3D, Wrestling Wars unleashes ten of the most dangerous, psychotic fighters from any universe.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have: *Miss Plastic Elastic*, *Terrahorn*, *2-Ton*, *The X-Cavator*, *Black Atom*, *Were-Raptor*, *Veg Head*, *Four Butz*, *DeathStalker* and the invincible *Man Mauler*!

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DARK FRANKENSTEIN

THE CREATURE

Deep in the dark, twisted city of Tyler lives a creature. It inhabits an area of Tyler known as The Maze; a brooding place full of alleyways and abandoned buildings.

A place so dangerous and desolate, the cops pretend it doesn't even exist.

This is the creature's 'home'.

Its body putrefying on its bones, its brain rotting in its head, it is little more than a walking corpse with only one primal, overriding need... to survive.

The killings begin.

MADDY

Detective Madeline Franke is six months pregnant.

A time to wind down, take things easy and lighten up on her homicide investigations, not what she wants at all. Then the murders begin.

Gruesome bodies are found with their limbs and vital organs missing. In her city, on her turf.

Is it the work of a serial killer, or is something more dangerous and bizarre loose in the city of Tyler?

For answers, she and her partner must dig deep, take deep breaths and then... venture into The Maze.

DETECTIVE IRA KLEIN

A tough cop but fair, Detective Ira Klein can kick ass and take names with the best of them.

Fiercely protective and respectful of Maddy, Ira is sometimes the only thing holding her together when they're confronted with the brutal events of their investigations.

Ira has growing concern for Maddy's well-being in her current state, and knows a time is coming when things are going to get more dangerous than the two detectives have ever imagined.

MR PEACE

A resident of The Maze for as long as his clouded memory allows him to remember, Charlie Peace and his three-legged dog stumble across the Creature in the dark alleyways, and begin to befriend him.

Does the creature somehow feel sympathy for this blind, homeless tramp, or is Charlie dangerously close to becoming the Creature's next victim?

PROFESSOR VAN THAL

Leader of the cult known as The Resurrected, Van Thal has a deadly obsession.

The ancient, emaciated, but infinitely wealthy leader is tracking the Creature for his own sinister purpose.

Using his own gruesome creations, he is finally closing in on his rotted prey.

What are the secrets of Van Thal's past, and the reasons for his obsession?

Can Maddy uncover the dark truth before it's too late?

THE RESURRECTED

Bizarre hybrids of flesh and metal, these four members of Van Thal's Resurrected cult act as his task force in tracking the Creature, and disposing of anyone foolish enough to stand in their way.

Mister Eye - His strange ocular enhancements can see where no human ever could.

Mister Hook - His harpoon-like arm attachments are used to reel in his prey.

Mister Sleep - His fingers have been replaced with syringes and needles to poison his enemies.

Mister Shock - Live wires woven into his hands allow him to electrocute his targets.

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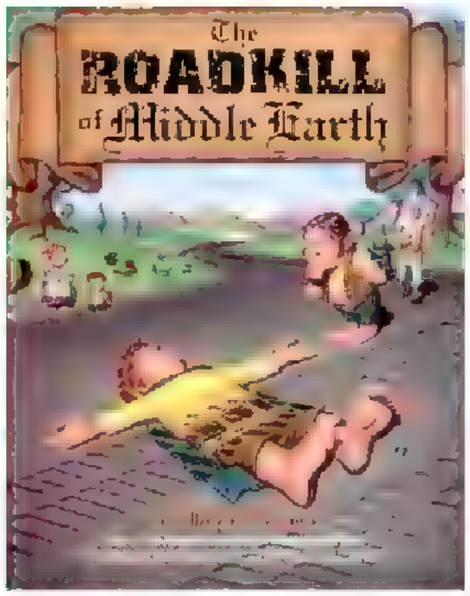
CARNELL'S KNOWLEDGE



JOHN Carnell knows what it's like to be a cult. He's celebrated this status with his much-missed UK humour comic **The Sleeze Brothers**, and with the release of **The Roadkill of Middle Earth** he enters into the territory of worldwide obsession born out of cult interest.

His new iBooks parody aims a Monty Python-sized boot at the mythos of J.R.R. Tolkien's **The Hobbit**. However, this novel was no labour-of-love like Ronald Tolkien's epic was. "From the publisher's point of view, it was a blatant tie in," said Carnell. "Sales are all they're interested in. I quite like them too! What an opportunity, three years of Ring movies, that's a lot of shelf life for a book!"

With the one-time Marvel UK writer entering well-trodden Tolkien territory - the spoof - he might possibly have suffered from the competition, but this wasn't the case. "I didn't find it difficult to get new angles... Luckily I've never read a parody of the **Lord of The Rings**... and up until I was commissioned, I'd never read more than **The Hobbit**.

"After taking the job, I had about a week to read all three books! By the end of that week I wanted to kill anything that even remotely resembled the 'little people from the shire'!

"Looking back, and this was pre-September 11, I started to draw parallels between the Hobbits' isolationism, and people we know today as Americans. But I never saw Mordor as part of the Evil Axis, more like the spirit of unbridled global capitalism and the environmental destruction this inevitably breeds - hence the roadkill angle. Killing the various characters (without ever being able to name them directly) was just a nice overlay.

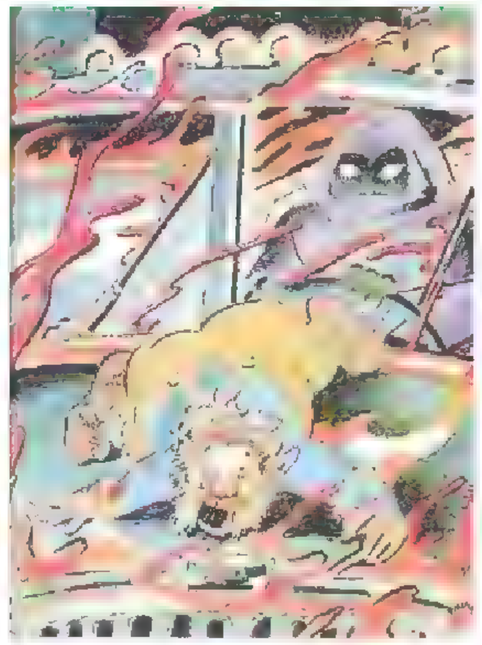
"This book was just a neat idea, but the follow-up I want to do is my **Fellowship**, as **Roadkill** is **The Hobbit**.

"In the follow-up story, the ring has resurfaced and a Halfwit comes back to our time, teaming up with a Dwarf from the Soho sex scene, a Voodoo priest from Brixton (wizard) and a crusty, tree-shagging road protester (elf) to do battle with a corrupt copper, hell bent on wielding ultimate power.

"We'll see how **Roadkill** sells first!"

The book, which saw a world release on December 3, also featured a veteran of the comics industry providing full-page illustrations. How Tom Sutton (artist on the original Marvel **Planet of the Apes** comics) got the job seems to be a mystery, and it's also strange that he didn't seem to fit Carnell's bill. "How did I get hitched up with Tom Sutton? I had no choice in the matter whatsoever. The illustrations were meant to be finely rendered black and white fantasy art. Oops! However, I liked Tom's artwork on this though, it's like looking at a deranged kids book. All I did was give him a big page description and off he went!"

Since Carnell's last high profile comics project - a three-part adaptation of Douglas Adams's **Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy**



for DC - he hasn't been idle. "I work mainly in films now, and I'm off to LA in March to flog a couple of screenplays. I have two films in production in this country, with a company called Isis. I also have an animated feature film about bats that Aardman are looking at.

"The plan is to sell some of these ideas I have into the big medium (film) and then work backwards, doing books, comic books, stage plays etc.

"Oh, and I nearly forgot, **The Sleeze Brothers** is getting lots of attention from various production companies at the moment, and keeps threatening to be a movie (script)."

Roadkill of Middle Earth, which also features a cover illustration by Steve Fastner and Rich Larson *(far left)*, costs £7.99 and should be available from most good book stockists. If this isn't the case in your town the ISBN is 0743434676 and the publisher is iBooks/Simon & Schuster.

ADVERTISING IN BORDERLINE

Want a worldwide audience as well as a concentrated homegrown one? Well, Borderline is downloaded by over 30,000 people from all over the world. Over 10,000 people in the UK, 10,000 people in the USA and even more than 5,000 people in South America. Plus thousands in Japan, South-East Asia, Africa and Europe. That should be a good enough reason alone to advertise and get your product seen by 30,000 plus dedicated comic fans. But there's more... It's also not as expensive as you might think...

½ page - 135mm x 190mm = £110 ($160)
¼ page - 135mm x 92mm or 67mm x 190mm = £65 ($95)
1/ 5 page - 50mm x 190mm = £50 ($80)
Display Classifieds:
50mm x 90mm = £30 ($50)
50mm x 40mm = £25 ($35)
Banner - 10mm x 275mm = £30 ($45)
BL Gold - Cover banner (15mm x 280mm) + ½ page advert = £400 ($600)

Webpage banner (available from April 2002) from as little as £100 per month.

Contact Phil Hall (details page 2)

A CAT IN HELL'S CHANCE?

Marvel is revamping Tigra, the hellcat invented by Tony Isabella – and stalwart of the Avengers since the late 1970s. The new creative team of Christina Z and Mike Deodato Jr are likely to produce an interesting read and an eye-catching product. Borderline did some digging in the kitty litter...

IT MIGHT star a B-list comics character, whose only claim to fame is that she was once a minor supporting character in the Avengers, but Marvel obviously feels there is a great deal of potential in Tigra, because they've recruited Top Cow cult writer Christina Z and dynamic Brazilian maestro Mike Deodato Jr. to produce the goods.

Tigra: Deepest Cuts explores the true nature of the woman known as Tigra, and also that of her alter ego, Greer Grant Nelson. The first issue begins with the unsolved murder of her police officer husband, and eventually sends Tigra on an odyssey of discovery through the halls of power. Z described it as "a feral hunter in an urban jungle!"

The story continues as Tigra discovers a police force full of crime and corruption. She also falls foul of The Brethren of the Blue Fist - a vigilante group serving their own brand of justice on the streets of New York. Her only way of stopping them ends up with her joining the Police Academy!

Borderline asked Mike Deodato Jr. about the project and working with Z. "Working with Christina has been quite easy. Her scripts are fluid, detailed, easy to follow, and excellent for exercising my skills as a storyteller. So, although I have no contact with her except for the scripts I receive by E-Mail, I'm having a lot of fun working on it."

Deodato also had something to say about the character's creator as well as the new scribe. "I also like her approach to the character. Tigra has been an underestimated character for years and usually was portrayed as less capable than her fellow Avengers. I read that Tony Isabella (her creator, and one of the coolest guys I've met at conventions) isn't satisfied with what has been done with his creation throughout the years, so I'm doing my best to make him happy, too."

He continued, "In this series, Tigra's complex psychological side is emphasized, and the reader is introduced to a, let's say, gothic aspect of her. Basically, Tigra is put in a more realistic environment, with herself being the only fantastic element of the story.

"I think it's a very good formula to mix super-

Comic art evolution! From break-downs to inks to colors. Mike Deodato Jr. choreographs much of his comics work.

TIGRA!
"THE NAME FIT- NO DOUBT THERE I HAD BEEN COMPLE EL TRANS FORMED INTO A CAT-WOMAN.
MY HANDS WERE LIKE PAWS. MY FEATURES FELINE AND THE SOFT FUR FROM MY SLEEK BODY IN A STRIPED PATTERN.
MY ALREADY & ONLY DEVELOPED SENSES WERE MORE REFINED THAN EVER. I'D ACQUIRED AN ALMOST ANIMAL INSTINCT
"ALTHOUGH I COULDN'T BE CERTAIN THEN... I ALSO FELT STRONGER THAN BEFORE
"I'D LITTLE TIME TO DWELL ON MY NEW FORM, FOR IN THAT INSTANT WE WERE
"--ATTACKED!"

Above: Mike Deodato Jr, Tony Isabella, Will Conrad and the lovely Jinky Coronado (otherwise known as Mrs Campiti) pose for a group photo. Plus Don Perlin and Vince Colletta's first drawing of Tigra from Giant-Sized Creatures #1 (1974). Words by Tony Isabella.

heroes with reality. Miracleman, Marvels, Watchmen, and Miller's Batman are there to prove it!"

Deodato then talked about his contribution and the changes he allowed in its production, "Although it's a color series, the scenario is just perfect for me to exercise my passion for extreme black and white art. I've always been a huge fan of b&w. This is the way I think comics works best. So, I'm putting my Paul Gulacy/Jm Steranko/John Burns/Will Eisner/Frank Miller/Al Willamson hats on and experimenting full tilt with all the possibilities that this style can offer. I did a lot of black and white stuff early in my career, and now I'm coming home, full circle!"

The first issue of Tigra: Deepest Cuts is released next month.

THE EVOLUTION OF COMICBOOK ART

EVER wondered what sort of process an artist has to go through before his editor says "That's a wrap!"?

Long-time friend of **Borderline** Mike Deodato Jr. gave us this exclusive sneak peek at what an artist has to do to get an initial concept turned into a fully-fledged *fait accompli*.

For Marvel's new **Tigra** series, Deodato produced a series of "breakdown" sketches to present to series editor Tom Brevoort before the final decision was made. Many people think that artists knock this stuff off everyday, so generally most are unaware of the amount of reworking they have to do.

"I like to offer any editor the minimum of three cover options," said Mike Deodato Jr. "These were for different Tigra editions. It takes me about fifteen minutes to draw each of them. Sometimes Tom [Brevoort] will ask me for a specific cover, like 'I think we should do something simple - perhaps a feral-looking Tigra leaping straight towards the camera, again rendered in high contrast.' Other times he may just ask me for general suggestions. Tom's extremely easy to work with!

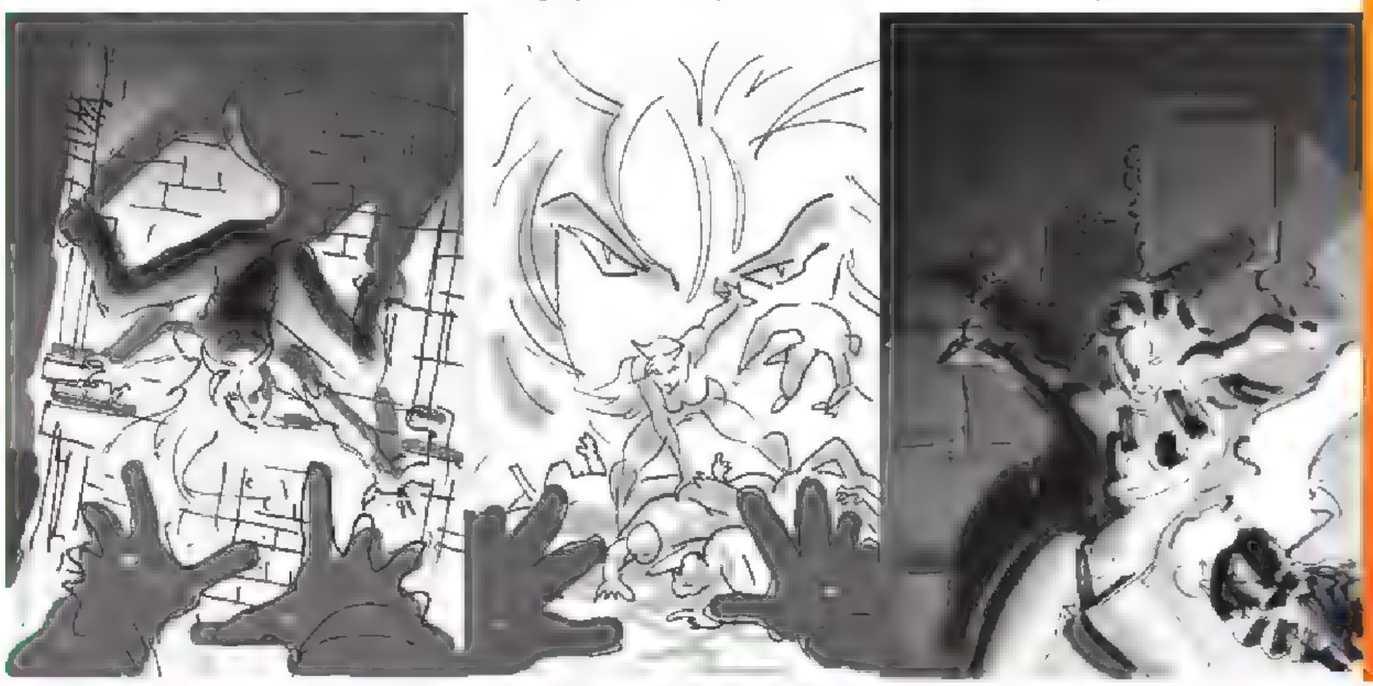
One of Deodato's biggest drawbacks since breaking into the US

More comic art evolution! Mike Deodato Jr uses the primary color of the character to balance, but also uses it like a black and white image, using, in this case, the orange to properly highlight the areas of focus. From b&w sketches to finished article!

comics scene has been the language barrier - being a predominantly Portuguese-speaking Brazilian, he depended on his friend and co-creator David Campiti to translate for him, but this has changed recently. "I started to deal directly with editors just a year ago - when my English got good enough for the task - and it has been so great since then. Things are much easier now."

Using an old technique employed by artists from Frank Hampson to John Byrne, Deodato plans his pages out using a form of photographic choreography. "A sample of my way of working nowadays: this example is the last panel of **Tigra** #2, page 8. First you see the sketch, then the pictures my wife took of me playing the characters, and then the final pencilled version."

One thing is certain - regardless how well received the new **Tigra** series is received, Deodato will certainly have earned his money!



COMICS 2040

by Paul Rainey

ARE YOU (A) THIS GUY?
MY LIFE SUCKS! I'M GONNA MAKE A SIGNIFICANT CHANGE, STARTING RIGHT NOW, BY GIVING UP COMICS!
OR (B) THIS GUY?
MY LIFE SUCKS! AT LEAST I HAVE A GREAT BIG COMIC COLLECTION! THE ONE GOOD THING IN MY LIFE!

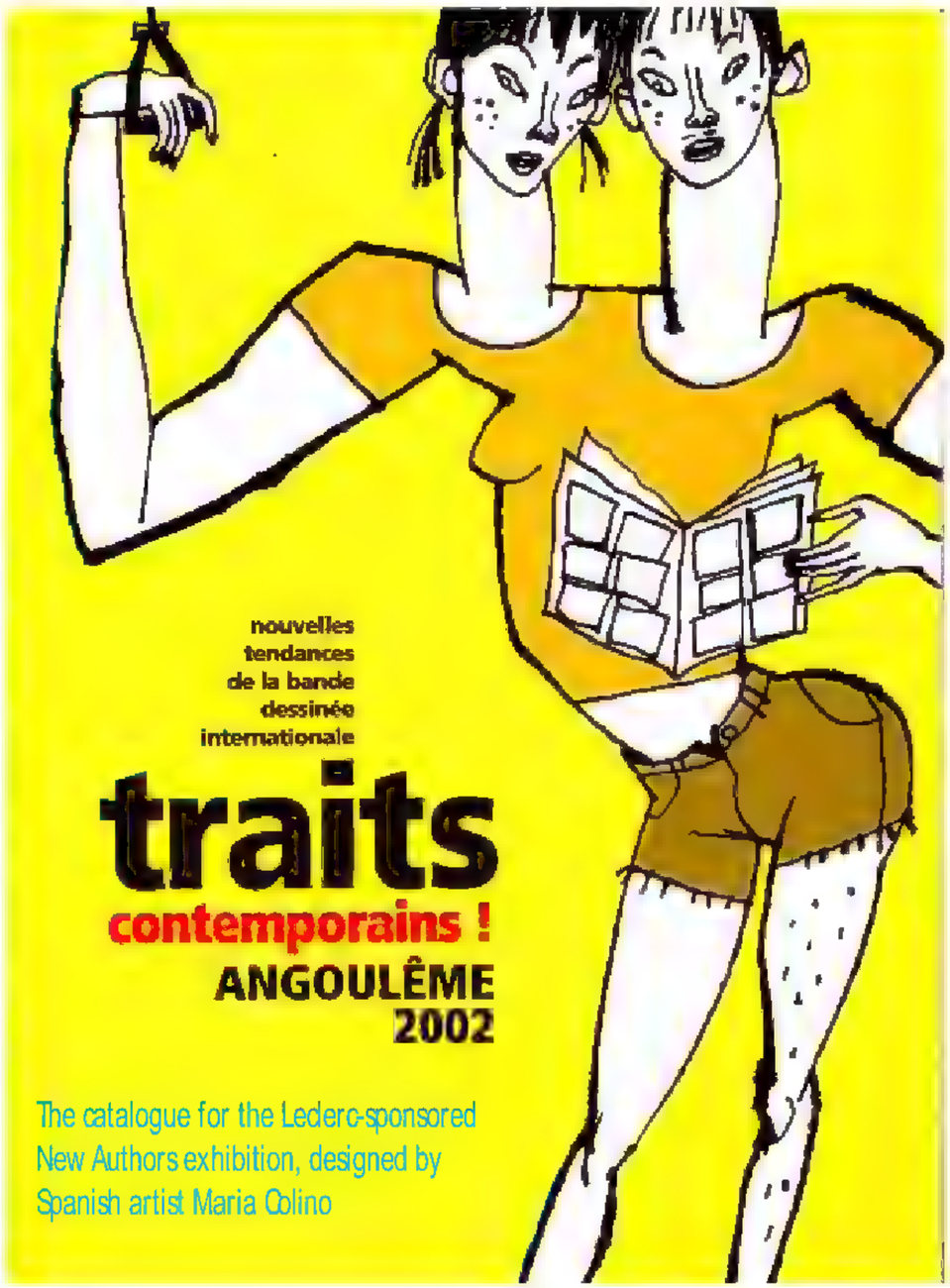
THE JOB INTERVIEW
WHAT ARE YOUR INTERESTS?
I'M INTERESTED IN ABSOLUTELY EVERY-THING! EVERYTHING EXCEPT COMICS.
... VERY GOOD ...
WHAT ARE YOUR INTERESTS?
COMICS.. YOU KNOW, AS AN ART FORM... I'M NOT A GEEK OR ANYTHING ...
THANK YOU, THAT'LL BE ALL.
BUT IT'S ONLY BEEN FIVE MINUTES!

I LOVE YOU, DADDY.
CHILDREN!
MY FRIENDS DON'T GET ON WITH THEIR DADS, BUT THEY ALL THINK YOU'RE OKAY.
THAT REMINDS ME, CHILDREN— DON'T TALK TO STRANGERS!
NEW MEN
FP

ASKING HER OUT
IF YOU'RE NOT DOING ANYTHING ON SATURDAY NIGHT, I HAVE TWO TICKETS TO (SOME COOL EVENT) AND I WAS WONDERING IF YOU'D LIKE TO COME ALONG WITH ME?
I'D LOVE TO.
"I CAN'T WORK OUT IF THIS ISSUE IS IN BAD TASTE, OR A WORK OF GENIUS"
WHY AM I HERE DRINK-ING BEER WHEN I COULD BE AT HOME WRITING MY REVIEW OF AMAZING SPIDER-MAN 36

ANGOULÊME: REAL CONVENTION

In the first part of our two part coverage of the Angoulême BD Salon 2002, Paul Gravett offers his overview of the festival, its atmosphere, its exhibitions, its awards and why you should go there next year!



The catalogue for the Lederc-sponsored New Authors exhibition, designed by Spanish artist Maria Colino

The 29th Angoulême International Comics Festival

January 24th to 27th 2002 FRANCE'S Angoulême International Comics Festival, always occurring over the last long weekend in January, is the start of the Comics New Year for me, and for a quarter of a million other visitors. I've been going every year, except one, since 1984. In my view, everyone at all passionate about comics should go, at least once. And once you've been, you'll want to go again and again.

One thing that keeps this long-running Festival vital and unpredictable is that each year it takes on the personality and spirit of the new President, the winner of the previous year's Grand Prix Alph'Art Award. This year's President was Martin Veyron, best known for his sexy comedies of manners, one of which he directed as a hit film. Proactive and keen to set his own tone, Veyron explained his vision in a special supplement to the national newspaper *Le Figaro* (which in itself proves how high profile comics can be just across the Channel).

"Bande dessinée is not a genre, it's a medium where numerous genres co-exist. To my mind this artform spends too much time navel-gazing. That's why I've changed the way Angoulême's prizes are nominated this year. My two main changes are simple: get rid of the 'Foreign' and 'Humour' Alph'Art Awards. Comics are enough of a cultural ghetto already, withoutsaddling an author with such and such a label. Awards for comics should be made for the quality of artwork, story and dialogue. So I've created Alph'Arts for artwork and dialogue.

"And this year, I've not chosen the members of the Alph'Art jury from the comics profession. That's why I've asked people like the novelist Anna Gavalda and photographer William Klein, so they will look afresh at contemporary BD creation, which I think is excellent. In fact, I'm quite optimistic about the 'nouvelle vague' of authors now emerging in this field."

Veyron's positive changes and forward-looking attitude pervaded this year's Awards process and programme of exhibitions. As well as the traditional Grand Prix exhibit at the city's landmark National Comics Centre or CNBDI, there were shows of originals by Veyron's collaborator Jean-Marc Rochette and by the Argentine cartooning genius Carlos Nine, both Alph'Art winners last year, and, to honour the guest country, the USA, by classic and

Above: This year's president, Martin Veyron . Below: a self-portrait of Veyron

A panel discussion with Festival special guest Will Eisner - sketch by Andy

current American creators. In two parallel displays, the Museum showed dozens of fine examples by the founding fathers, from two breathtaking Krazy Kat Sunday pages by George Herriman to a complete Spirit story by Will Eisner, and then spotlighted some of today's most interesting "independent" innovators, including Jessica Abel, Peter Bagge, Howard Cruse, Tom Hart, Stan Sakai, Jill Thompson and Chris Ware, many of them still little known or translated in France.

The latter exhibition, curated by historian and cartoonist Jean-Paul Jennequin, was particularly revealing, as it showed every stage in the artists' work, from roughs and edited scripts, reference photos and research items, through to the finished originals and printed comics. It even opened with a life-size recreation of a "typical" American comic shop, based on "Friendly Frank's" with its toys, cardboard boxes and double-bagged collectors' items; the sort of alien environment unfamiliar to most French readers used to shopping in more upmarket BD boutiques or the main bookshop chains. The CNBDI also had a side exhibit, in its massive bookshop, of Joe Sacco's work from Safe Area Gorazde. The only disappointment was that there were no accompanying catalogues.

Continuing Veyron's tone, the Festival's principal sponsor, the supermarket giants Leclerc, made possible a huge exhibition of seventy six Francophone and international creators or writer/artist teams, under the title "Searching for the Authors of Tomorrow", filling all four floors of the city's modernised theatre. Imaginatively displayed in specially designed and constructed frames, metalwork, even hanging birdcages, it was like exploring an Aladdin's cave. Forty eight of the authors were French, Belgian or Swiss, but many other countries were represented, from Brazil's Marcello Lelis to Norway's Jason. The four British-based creators chosen - Simon Gane, Nabiel Kanan, Roger Langridge, Andi Watson - joined North Americans like Greg Cook, Dave Cooper, Tony Millionaire, Ron Rege Jr., Johnny Ryan and Craig Thompson. There was a chunky useful paperback catalogue too, given away free.

There were other attractions, such as Regis Loisel and a themed tent on sport comics, but for me the other unmissable exhibit was by the totally deranged publishers of Ferraille, an underground magazine on sale from newstands. They had converted one space into a Ferraille Supermarket, with shelves stacked high with joke tins, bottles and packages, all product parodies with mad labels and graphics designed by their cartoonists, principally the geniuses Winshluss and Cizo. The whole team were dressed in drab supermarket uniform and when I bought my wacky tin of cat food for the fussiest cat, promising "a complete family of mice inside", the young lady behind the counter chatted away to me in an unnerving sing-song voice and made a loud "Beep" when she pretended to scan it. Talk about "No Logo" and subversive anti-capitalist satire.

The Palais de Justice, venue for the New Authors exhibition - sketch by Andy

Refreshingly, for the first time, following Veyron's adjustments, practically every category in the revised Alph'Art Awards featured international nominees, as opposed to just creators from France or maybe Belgium. The French BD market is riding higher than ever, with the sixth consecutive increase in the annual output of albums last year. A phenomenal 1,292 new albums were published in 2001, plus 406 reprints, 146 books of illustration by comics artists, 46 books of comics history and criticism - making a grand total of 1,890 titles! I certainly heard some grumblings that there were simply too many BDs being pumped out and that certain albums were suffering from being swamped by such overproduction and not getting noticed or promoted enough.

The BD bestseller list confirms that the populist classics still command the biggest readerships. Way out in the lead at 2,288,065 copies was the latest, and possibly last, Asterix by Uderzo (the live-action sequel movie was being previewed during the Festival and early reports indicate that it's a big improvement on the first). In second place came new kids' superstar Titeuf by Zep, whose nine albums cumulatively sold 2,620,546 copies. Other traditional favourites include the thoroughly British detective duo Blake and Mortimer, whose new album shifted 458,875 copies, and then Petit Spirou and Boule et Bill with 374,690 and 345,044 copies respectively. Other successes not far behind were the fantasy heroes Lanfeust and Thorgal and the final Lucky Luke album by Morris, who died last year. This puts all the fuss about Dark

Knight 2 into some perspective, doesn't it?

The Alph'Art results, once again, recognised works of real quality and not necessarily the mammoth blockbusters. Best Album was the first swashbuckling volume of Isaac le Pirate by Christophe Blain. The indefatigable Jacques Tardi scooped the best artwork Alph'Art for the first part of his adaptation of Jean Vautrin's Le Cri du Peuple. It is powerfully illustrated but some people felt that a previous Grand Prix winner really shouldn't be eligible for a subsequent Alph'Art. The book was also the public's favourite of the year. The award for best story went to Marjane Satrapi and Persepolis Book 2, continuing her moving autobiography about her childhood in Iran, which I wrote about in a previous Borderline. Of all people, the utterly wacky American Kaz won the best dialogue Alph'Art for the French edition of his Underworld strips - credit too, clearly, to his translator. The slice-of-life author Blanchin picked up the best first album prize, while Howard Cruse won the critics' prize for the French version of Stuck Rubber Baby.

The last Alph'Art, the all-important Grand Prix, is left till Saturday to be announced to the crowds from the balcony of the imposing town hall. The inspired choice was Francois Schuiten, artist, with writer Benoit Peeters, of the Cities of the Fantastic series, of which four books have been translated into English by NBM. Schuiten is a Belgian, and only the second non-French creator to receive this honour (Morris won the Grand Prix at the 20th Festival). Both Will Eisner and Hugo Pratt have been given special awards for their work but were not Grand Prix winners and Festival Presidents.

Next year, Angoulême hits 30. There were some worries about a new potentially rival BD Salon being launched this June in Paris taking away exhibitors and visitors. No doubt some don't make the trip down from Paris, but most people agreed that it cannot compare to the atmosphere and impact of Angoulême. In Paris, it will just be a big trade fair, one of many cultural events filling the capital. In Angoulême, the whole city comes alive to celebrate the 9th art, from the Cathedrals to the Food Markets, filling every street and shop. Every year I meet "first-timers" who have made the pilgrimage and are usually in culture shock and BD overload. This year creators Gary Spencer-Millidge, Nabiel Kanan and Peter Kuper and publishers Chris Staros & Brett Warnock from Top Shelf and Bren Byrne from Toenail Clippings were among the Angoulême initiates. It's only a few hours away by Eurostar and TGV, so "Go on, go on, go on", start planning now - and I'll see you there in 2003. For more information and inspiration see their websites: *www.bedangouleme* and *www.labd.com*

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KINGS OF THE WORLD

BORDERLINE staged dawn raids at two safe houses, known to be frequented by the Shrunken Head Studios supremos, Arvid Nelson and Eric'J' Johnson. Caught unawares, the two were bundled into an unmarked van and taken to a secure location for questioning about the project known as Rex Mundi. The interrogator, Borderline's Jay Eales, began gently enough, by asking series writer Arvid Nelson to set the scene...

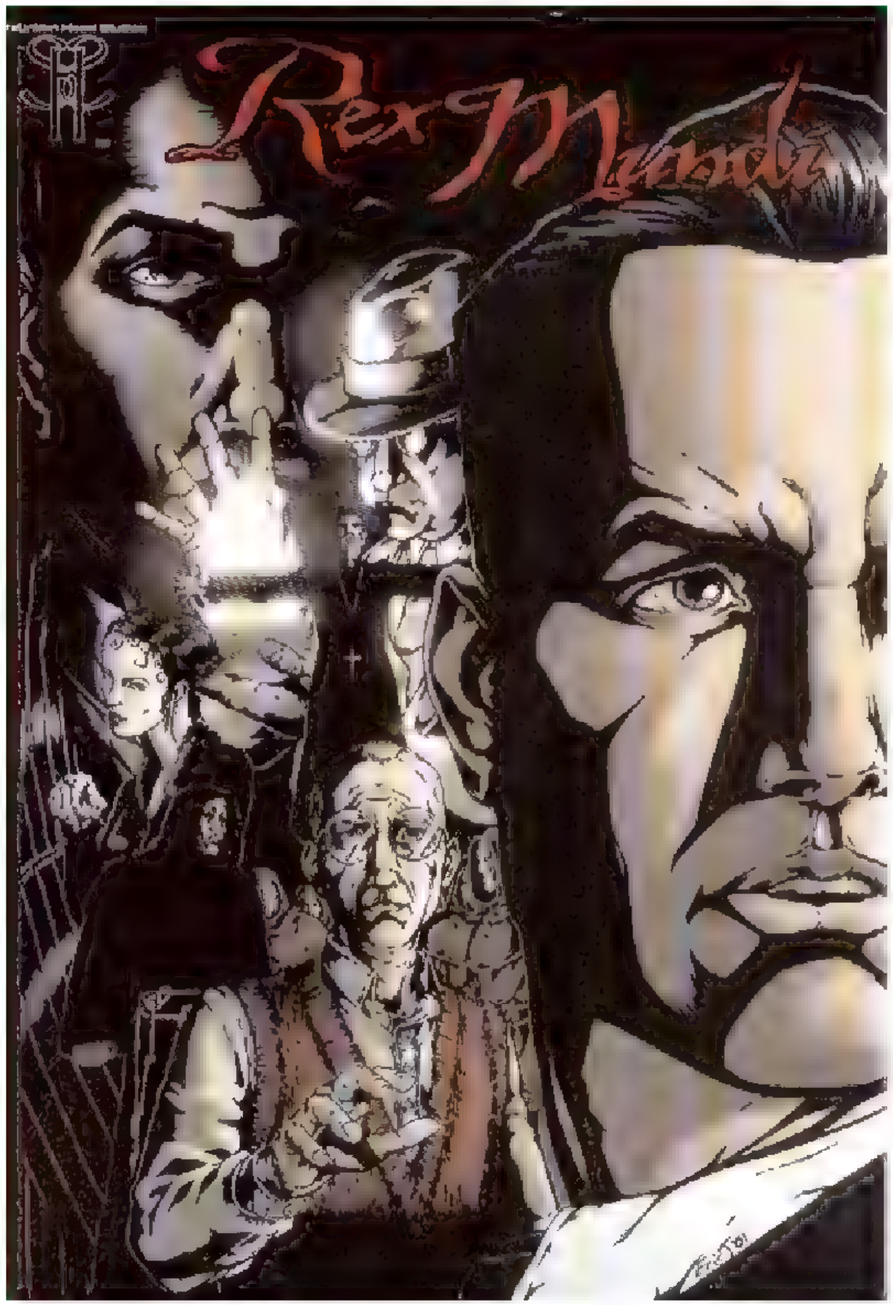
"**REX Mundi** is set in Paris, 1933, but not in the Paris of our world. Two things make **Rex Mundi** radically different: first of all, history has progressed differently. In 1521, agents of the Catholic Church assassinated Martin Luther, before the Reformation could take place. So, although the outward trappings of the world of **Rex Mundi** look very art deco - jazz night clubs, fedoras, trench coats and lonely street lamps - social conditions are basically mediaeval. The Church still enforces its power through the Inquisition, which has become an organization something like the KGB or the Gestapo; the nobility of Europe still have a stranglehold on power and trade is regulated by the mediaeval system of guilds. Secondly, magic is real in **Rex Mundi**. By 'magic', I don't mean the Gandalf-the-wizard stereotype associated with sword-and-sorcery fiction. Magic in **Rex Mundi** is a little bit more subtle, based on heretical Christianity, occult Judaism and supposedly 'hidden knowledge' encoded in the Torah and certain books of the New Testament.

"The plot of **Rex Mundi** is, essentially, a twisted quest for the Holy Grail in the form of a murder mystery. I don't want to give too much away in this regard, but suffice it to say an investigation into a bizarre theft of a medieval manuscript becomes, as the main character discovers, a quest to uncover an ancient secret revolving around the origins of Christianity, a secret of tremendous political as well as religious importance."

Without prompting, ***Rex Mundi*** *artist Eric J then began to blab.* "To add my two cents to what Arvid said, **Rex Mundi** is an old-fashioned film noir style mystery that will eventually morph into a pulp style high adventure, with political intrigue, apocalyptic war, and secret societies thrown in for good measure. **Rex** starts off very small, with a friend in need, but it becomes much, much more as Dr. Sauniere (our main character) is drawn into this world within the world, so to speak."

Having explored the scenario for the series, ***Borderline*** *wanted to dig a little deeper, to find out a little more about Shrunken Head Studios. Nelson was first under the interrogator's spotlight.* "I've always loved comics, but my primary interest before **Rex Mundi** was film. I landed a few jobs and internships as a 'PA', or 'production assistant' in film lingo, which is basically synonymous with 'serf.' It

Brother Matthew
CHAPTER
IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE AN HONOR TO SIT IN ON THE INQUIRY OF A SUSPECT
NNGH... NO...
AFTER ALL, I HAD JUST DROPPED THE HAMMER ON A GROUP OF GALVANIST TERRORISTS. THEY WERE WANTED IN CONNECTION WITH A SERIES OF CHURCH BOMBINGS IN RENNES AND THE DESECRATION OF SEVERAL HOLY SHRINES AROUND THE CITY.
AND I FOUND THEM. ME. JUST A JUNIOR MONK. JUST A NOVATE - I DON'T THINK I WAS MUCH OLDER THAN 17 AT THE TIME. I HADN'T EVEN DONNED MY MASK YET, BUT THERE I WAS, IN THE INQUIRY CHAMBER.
DON'T... PLEASE, OH GOD...



occurred to me I was spending all of my time fetching coffee and playing security guard and none of my time writing, which is what's most important to me. So I decided to drop out and focus on writing. Comics appealed to me because it's a great way to tell a 'high concept' story at relatively low cost."

Under the steely gaze of the interviewer, Nelson continued, "I was in Paris, working on a documentary film when I had the idea for **Rex Mundi**. But I had no one to draw it. Fortunately, I had some very talented friends who were self-publishing their own comic book, and they invited me to the San Diego comic book convention. I had never been to a convention before, and I had no idea what to expect. When I got there, I was really surprised. I couldn't believe the number of profoundly talented artists wandering around, dying to draw a story. Of the dozens and dozens of portfolios I saw, one person's really stood out: Eric's. Not only could he draw superheroes, but he could also draw fire engines, buildings, clouds, explosions, Greek columns... in other words, he was the total package, and I knew that he'd be perfect. Literally the instant I returned from the convention I sent him an email, and literally that evening he replied. The rest, hopefully, will be history."

Eric J (aka Eric Johnson) was placed under restraint in the interrogation chair, still warm from his compatriot. Within seconds, he began his confession. "My name is Eric J. I'm not as young as I wish I was anymore, and **Rex Mundi** and **Brother Matthew** comprise my first and only professional comic work to date. Arvid and I have been developing and producing **Rex Mundi** and **Brother Matthew** for a little over two years now, it will be three exactly in August, when **Rex** is released. Prior to this my professional art experience consisted of CD cover art for a couple of San Diego area bands and spot illustrations for friends. I am self-trained for the most part, although I do have some college level art training under my belt. I played for many years in a local San Diego band by the name of 'Time'. I live with a dog and cat, but do not own them."

The interview was suspended while Johnson (or, as he prefers to be known, 'J') asked for some water. ***Borderline*** *is nothing if not humane, and so, after a short break, J continued his tale.* "As for the genesis of **Rex** from my side of the aisle; Arvid caught me at perhaps the most opportune time in San Diego, 1999. Up until that time my only focus in terms of comics art was trying to obtain employment drawing super-heroes with one of the big two, however by this time I was finally starting to break from that narrow focus both in my mindset and in my art. In terms of mindset my mind was beginning to open to other genres in comics. That was due in no small part to public comments from Warren Ellis and others expounding on the idea that western (and maybe that should read 'American') graphic literature should more readily encompass a wider breadth of genres rather than focusing so intently on super-heroes. In terms of my art I was rediscovering the work of Bill Sienkiewicz, Neal Adams, Hal Foster, and others, which was increasing my awareness of the complete page, including rich backgrounds and details other than super-heroes. Those two factors combined in getting Arvid and I talking, and in allowing me to see the incredible potential in Arvid's treatment. From there we took a leap of faith together."

As J's throat went dry

again, the inquisitor turned his attention back upon the writer, demanding to know about the secondary plan whereby Project ***Rex Mundi*** *would spread the word across the World Wide Web. Surprised by the interrogator's knowledge, Nelson sang like a birdie.* "Eric initially proposed we do some kind of **Rex Mundi** web comic, and I came up with the character of **Brother Matthew**, the protagonist of our eponymous web comic. We both agreed it would be cool to do a web story set in the world of **Rex Mundi**, but not directly connected to the main thrust of the plot of the print comic. Because of this, a lot of people have asked us if **Brother Matthew** is just a promotional shill or a stand-alone web comic. And the answer is this: it's a stand-alone comic. You do not and will not ever need to pick up an issue of **Rex Mundi** to understand what's happening in **Brother Matthew**, and we're not going to put the conclusion to a cliffhanger episode of **Brother Matthew** at the back of **Rex Mundi** to boost sales of our book. At the same time, we're certainly hoping people who like **Brother Matthew** will be inclined to pick up **Rex Mundi** when it hits the shelves this August. I also plan on having some of the minor characters in **Rex Mundi** take part in episodes of **Brother Matthew**, and vice-versa, so there will be an added layer of 'oh yeah - that guy!!' enjoyment for people who read both comics."

Proud of the way their plans would devilishly entrap readers in a pincer movement, nothing could still Nelson's tongue now. "I've always been interested in the idea of a story that transcends a particular medium. It seems like most video/computer games are basically knock-offs of already established comics, books or movies. I think it would be really interesting to see a story that was told one way in a comic book and then from a different perspective in a computer game or a print book. Each story would be independent, but each would also be mutually enriching. I guess you could call it 'meta-media'. Whatever the case, **Brother Matthew** has been a very interesting experiment for us."

As though in competition to see which of them could confess their sins first, J piped up once more. "Again to add to what Arvid said, I was very interested in doing a webstrip to accomplish a couple of things; first, I thought there might be a way to generate some much needed income from a webstrip (there hasn't been yet); second, I thought it would be a great way to introduce people to the world of **Rex Mundi**, the creative team, the look and feel of our stories, etc., which it has done wonderfully; third, I thought it might be a something to keep our fans entertained and actively with us until **Rex Mundi** came out; fourth, once **Rex** does come out, and assuming it continues past its debut in **Image Introduces #6** it will provide a cool extra to our fans between issues; and fifth, I thought it would just present fans on the web with a cool little comic they could follow even independently of **Rex**. So I eventually wore Arvid down to the point that he turned it on me and said, 'OK, but what do you think we should do?' Well, funnily enough, I had no idea beyond 'let's do a webcomic', so then Arvid came up with the great idea to do it about a young inquisitor, which would let us explore the Inquisition in more full detail than we might in **Rex**. Actually, nicely organic to the story, we're getting to do that a lot with **Brother Matthew**. To be honest, Arvid's created such a detailed and extensive world for our story to exist in we're not going to have room to cover as much of the cool stuff that we'd like to, and **Brother Matthew**'s going to help us in that regard as well. So, even though they're separate stories, reading one will enhance the enjoyment you take from the other."

By now, there was no stopping him, and Eric J finished his lengthy list of sins by admitting to future plans to ensure that everyone would be sucked in by ***Rex Mundi*** *or his cyber-accomplice* ***Brother Matthew****.*

"We would like to collect story arcs of **Brother Matthew** into trades at some point, assuming there's interest. I've thought in the past, personally, that **Brother Matthew** should stay web-exclusive, but I've recently had a change of heart and Arvid and I have begun seriously discussing attempting to get **Brother Matthew** into newspapers and the like. It's really interesting, but since we do **Brother Matthew** in the sort of strict strip format, I've found that I really enjoy that format very much, and, surprisingly, I have found that I have a strong affinity for the idea of having a strip in the Sunday comics page, for instance. So that's something I think we'll start looking at down the road a bit."

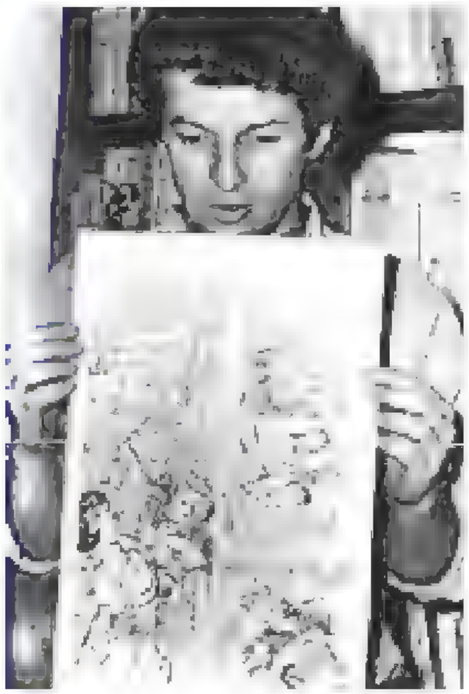
At the termination of the interview, Arvid Nelson and Eric J were released into the blazing sunshine, and allowed to go about their business, with no word of explanation from the inquisitor. But rest assured, citizens of the world, for ***Borderline*** *will be diligently watching them as their plans come to fruition. We would suggest that you do the same.*

Be vigilant!

Image Introduces: Rex Mundi will be solicited in the June issue of *Previews* and will be on sale in comic shops in August.

BL

ALEXANDER JODOROWSKY METABARON

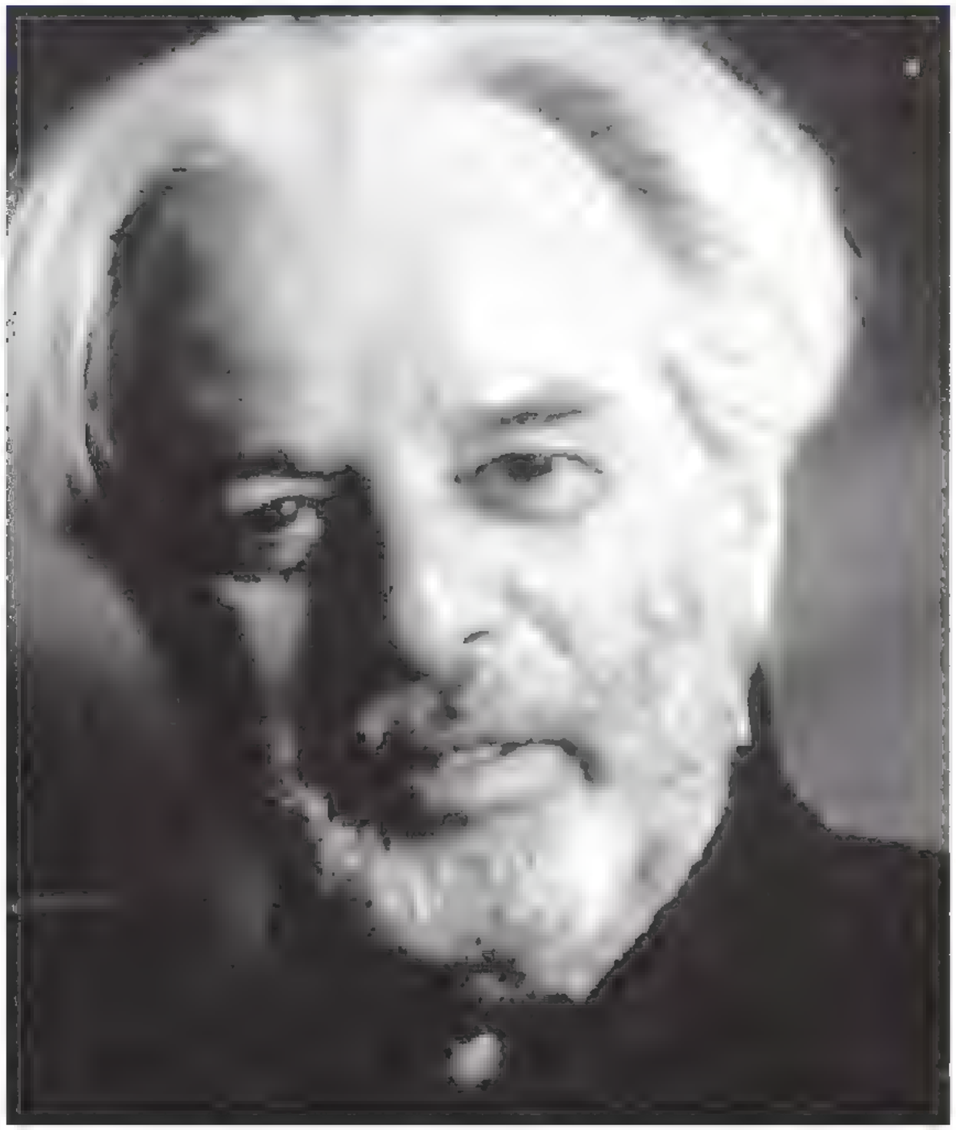


Alexander Jodorowsky is one of Europe's most eminent comic writers, a polymath artist with a career history quite unlike that of anyone else working in the medium. After studying mime under Marcel Marceau, directing musical extravaganzas for Maurice Chevalier and stunning cinema audiences with visceral films like El Topo *and* The Holy Mountain *he turned to comics, creating a distinct body of work that has been both critically and commercially successful. With the second collection of his highly acclaimed Metabarons series now available in the shops, he talks to Borderline's Tom Lennon about the origin of his comics career, future projects and dream collaborations in this exclusive interview.*

BORDERLINE: Do you prefer "Alejandro" or "Alexandro"? I've seen it spelled both ways, but I figure you'd have the definitive answer.
Alexander Jodorowsky: Alexandro is used for the books printed in French. Alejandro is reserved for the books in Spanish language. [Consequently] for the US it would be Alexander. I like that my name offers little variation possibilities, therefore, I do not identify myself with any.

BL: Many comics readers [myself included] first discovered your work during the 1980s with the publication of The Incal. For those unfamiliar with the details, can you tell us how this remarkable collaboration with Moebius first came about?
AJ: We worked together on the script of Dune for about two years, but in the end the movie did not get picked up. The script contained at least 3000 drawings, the majority by Moebius, some by Giger, Foss and others. Dune by Herbert is a very literary book, therefore we had to create about 50% of visual scenes. Moebius suggested that we treat this failure with a change in the path, that we would create a comic with my ideas Furthermore, I had a dream where I travelled through space. There I saw two interwoven pyramids, one white and the other black. I enter into this image and I converted into the pyramids, [before] taking off in a galaxy of light. With all this material we started the work on The Incal.

BL: Besides the Metabarons and the TechnoPriests, are there any other characters from The Incal you'd like to explore in comic form?



AJ: For the children I would like to expand the world of the concrete birds with Deepo as their hero. For the adults I would like to further explore the repulsive adventures of Gorgo Le Sale.

BL: Humanoids is currently publishing The Incal in its entirety, complete with gorgeous recolouring by Fred Beltran which adds - in my opinion - new depth to Moebius and Janjetov's art. How do you feel about this 'new look' Incal?

AJ: That satisfies me. The old colors prevented [the audience's chances] to experience the dramatic depth of the history [meaning story] and the excellent quality of Janjetov's drawings.

BL: Prior to The Incal you collaborated with Moebius on a wonderful horror story called Les Yeux du Chat [The Eyes of The Cat]. You have said that this was to be the first part of a trilogy. Do you intend to return to the story?

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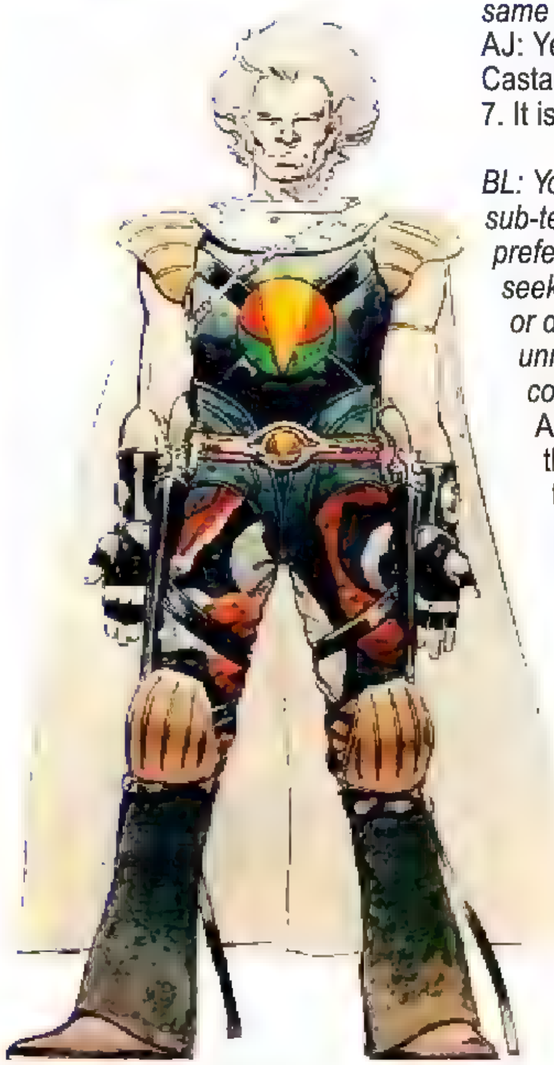


AJ: Moebius is extremely busy in producing drawings of this complicated quality. Maybe I should try to do the sequel with a different artist. How do you like this?

BL: A few years ago I would have flinched at the notion of anyone other than Moebius illustrating the sequel. After seeing Zoran Janjetov's stunning artwork on Before The Incal, however, my sensibilities are not so stubborn. You once said: "I ask of film what most North Americans ask of psychedelic drugs." Do you ask the same of comics?
AJ: Yes. You just have to read the Castaka of the Metabarons number 7. It is a true delirium.

BL: Your stories are always rich in sub-text and symbolism. Would you prefer your audience to actively seek out these "hidden meanings", or do you prefer it to go by unnoticed, to bypass the conscious mind?
AJ: I write in multiple levels at the same time. I direct myself to different levels of the readers in the same story. The kids have fun with it, the cultured adults can find hidden messages that I place on every page.

BL: While The Incal and The Metabarons share the same universe, they are two very different animals. Looking at your various collaborations, I'm struck by how effortlessly you seem to adapt your stories to the style and strengths of the artists you work with. How do you set about achieving this creative synthesis? I imagine it differs from artist to artist...
AJ: Yes, it differs for every artist. When I begin a new partnership I investigate the mentality of the artist. I find out about his preferences, what he does not dare to imagine, his methods, his emotional life, his ideas. Last, in a concealed fashion I psychoanalyze him. Soon I write a story tailored to his psyche. The subject matter has to entice him, he has to be able to identify himself with the characters, etc. I don't write just for myself: I write for an artist. And through the artist I fix them up to express my views.

BL: You've worked with some of the most talented artists in the business, including Moebius, Giminez and Georges Bess. Are there any other artists you'd like to work with?
AJ: For the moment I am like a man that is satisfied with his admirers and who does not need anything else. Nevertheless, I enjoy working with talented artists. But now, since I am extremely busy, they would have to come and get me.

BL: If you could physically go back in time, what artists from comics' past would you work with? I ask this because I recently re-read Moebius and Stan Lee's Silver Surfer comic and found myself wondering what strange magic Alejandro Jodorowsky and Jack Kirby could have created together...
AJ: Yes, Jack Kirby, but also Steve Ditko and Steranko.

BL: We've seen some teasing glimpses of Travis Charest's breathtaking artwork on your forthcoming Dreamshifters book. How did this collaboration come about?
AJ: Through one of these magical coincidences - Fabrice Giger, my editor, being apart for thousands of kilometers - we had the same idea at the same time: that Travis should illustrate the Dreamshifters. Fabrice suggested it to Travis and he accepted immediately, even came to live for some time in Paris to work on it.

BL: Could you give us a "teasing glimpse" into the story?
AJ: Impossible. I am capable of writing any type of long stories, but I am not able to deliver summaries.

BL: I believe that this is the first time you've worked with an artist more commonly associated with American superhero titles. Are there any other artists who work in this genre that you admire, and, if so, can you envisage working with them?
AJ: There are four artists that I

admire, and with whom I would like to work together, however, since they are sometimes artists and writers, they do not need me for anything. The deceased Harold R. Foster. The super neurotic Crumb. The classical Stan Sakai. The profound Will Eisner. Four genii!

BL: Are there any comics you are currently reading? Any recommendations?
AJ: These days I broaden my life in reading Lone Wolf and Cub.

BL: Did you read comics as a child?
AJ: Oh, yes! Prince Valiant (I fell in love with Aleta). Mandrake, Flash Gordon, Popeye, Little Orphan Annie, Buck Rogers, etc.

BL: Another thing that distinguishes you from other filmmakers who write comics is the fact that your earliest work in the field - such as Fabulas Panicas Weekly in the 1960s - actually pre-dates your movie career. Would you be kind enough to tell us how you first became involved in writing comics?
AJ: In the Fifties an artist from Vanguardia declared that comics are the poetry and the novel of the future. He believed it to be a form of art as big as the movies. Taking advantage of my celebrity status in Mexico, I proposed to a big newspaper to illustrate in their weekly culture segment one comics page per week. They hired me immediately and so we continued for five years. We had one million readers each week.

BL: When Pauline Kael reviewed El Topo, *she linked Fabulas Panicas to the works of Robert Crumb and other 1960s underground comic creators. At the time, did you see yourself as part of this movement?*
AJ: I never considered myself [aligned] to any movement nor to any political party. I have an anarchistic spirit or, better, very liberated like a Metabaron. However, I collected all the underground comics. The only one that communicated with me and that had a homage to *El Topo* was [by] Spain [Rodriguez].

BL: With Fabulas Panicas you illustrated your own scripts. Have you ever felt the urge to return to the drawing board?
AJ: No. Watching Moebius draw I suffered an everlasting complex. I feel ashamed of my drawings.

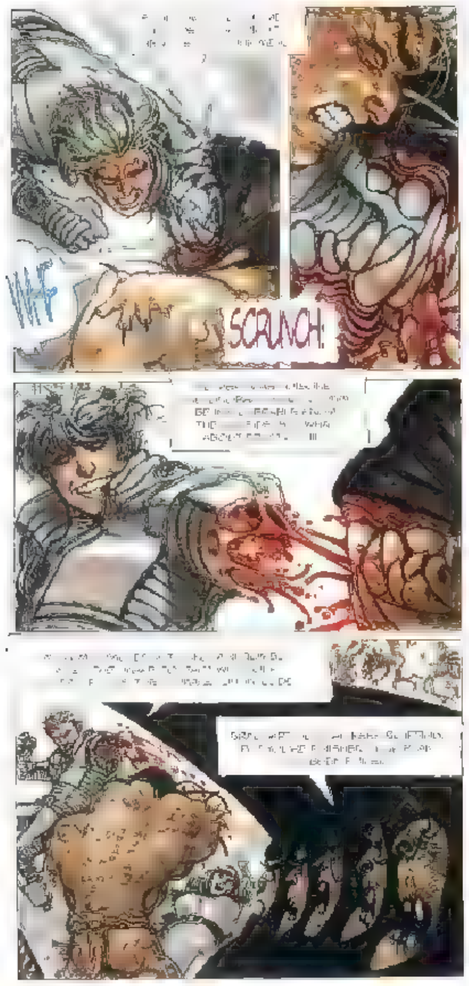
BL: Now that films based on comics are back in vogue, have you ever thought of adapting one of your own titles to the big screen?
AJ: I prefer that others take on to it. The level of idiocy when Hollywood adapts a comic script repulses me. Actually, for me, I see greater artistic possibilities in creating a comic than making a movie.

BL: There was some talk of a Metabarons movie a few years ago but Hollywood, in its infinite wisdom, wanted someone else to direct it. Do you know what happened to this? Is the film still in development?
AJ: I don't know.

BL: Personally, I think The Metabarons would work better as an opera than a movie. As an artist who has worked in many fields, can you imagine any of your comics being adapted for a medium other than film?
AJ: What idea is this, wanting to adapt one art into another form of art? Comics are comics and they are doing perfectly well in continuing to be comics.

BL: Have you ever considered returning to characters from your movies in comics form?
AJ: Once again the same mistake: movies should remain to be movies and comics should continue to be comics. When I write comics I don't think about the movies. When I'm shooting I don't think about comics.

BL: Humanoids English-language publication of Metabarons and The Incal has created a new generation of Jodorowsky fans. Many of them will be eager to see your movies El Topo *and* The Holy Mountain, *but will be surprised at how damnably hard they are to get hold of. For the benefit of those unfamiliar with the grisly details, can you tell us why these films have been hidden away from the public?*
AJ: These films are in the pseudo-legal possession of the producer Allan Klein. This man hates me to death and he has decided to deny the public from watching my movies. At the moment we are in a legal



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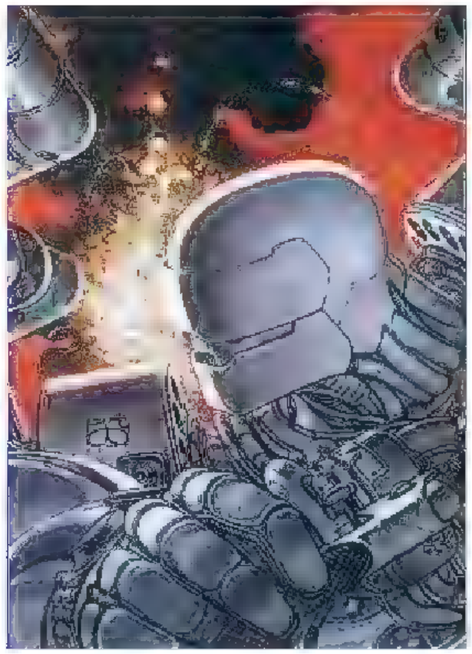
battle, where I am trying to recover what is mine: the right to show these movies.

BL: In a television interview with Jonathan Ross a decade or so ago, you described how you felt after seeing David Lynch's Dune *movie. I seem to remember it made you laugh for hours. Did you see the Sci Fi Channel's recent adaptation and, if so, did it provoke a similar response?*
AJ: All this belongs to the past and it does not concern me anymore. I watched one minute into it and I turned the TV off. It wasn't the Martians that invaded our planet, it was the imbeciles.



BL: Your Dune project featured an amazing cast of collaborators including Orson Welles, Salvador Dali, Moebius and H.R. Giger. If you had the chance to make an epic science fiction movie now - and money was no obstacle - who would you recruit this time around?
AJ: As actors I would only recruit talented people but not famous. I find that the poison to the movies are the stars.

BL: While we're on the subject of your films, can you provide us with a status report on Abelcain *[aka 'The Sons of El Topo']? Is Marilyn Manson still involved?*
AJ: Yes. M. Manson is still involved. However, the weight remains on my shoulders of getting the money together for the production. I don't know if I will succeed in getting it.

BL: Let's hope you do. Thanks for taking the time to talk to us, Alejandro, and I hope you continue to shock and amaze us for many years to come.

Special thanks to Ian Sattler for help with this interview

Next issue:
Aspecial
Humanoids feature

Comics & Filmworks of Jodorowsky

Comics: English Language Editions

[In sequence of original publication. Titles originally published by Les Humanoides Associes unless otherwise indicated]

The Eyes of the Cat [1978], art by Moebius. Following the collapse of the *Dune* project, this psychological horror story was the first comics collaboration between Jodorowsky and Moebius. The only English language edition appeared in Steve Bisette's Taboo anthology [Volume 4, 1990].
The Incal [6 volumes, 1980-89], art by Moebius. The discovery of a mystical artifact turns Class-B Private Eye John DiFool into the reluctant protagonist of this mind-bending cosmic adventure. Published in English by Marvel's Epic imprint [three volumes, 1989], the entire saga is now being serialised - from the prequel through to the sequel - in the US comic format by LA-based Humanoids Publishing.
Alandor [2 volumes, 1984], art Sylvio Cadelo. The hero is banished by his community because of a dreadful skin disease that causes hands to grow out of his body. An English translation of the first volume - The Jealous God - published in Heavy Metal magazine [October & November 1985].
The White Lama [6 volumes, 1988-1993], art George Bess. Following an apocalyptic prophesy, a wise old Tibetan monk abandons his ancient flesh in order to face the impending menace in a strong, young body that befits this vigorous task. Unfortunately, reincarnation isn't an exact science. Published in six hardcover French-style albums by Humanoids.
Before The Incal [aka Young John DiFool; 6 volumes,1989-1995], art Zoran Janjetov. Prequel to the acclaimed saga in which a not-quite-so world weary John DiFool earns his detective credentials investigating the strange disappearance of prostitutes' babies. The entire Incal saga is currently being serialised by Humanoids Publishing [see entry for The Incal].
In The Heart of the Impregnable Meta-Bunker [1990], art Moebius. A one-off tale that set the scene for the Metabaron saga to follow. Appeared in Heavy Metal magazine [March 1990] and A1 [volume 4, 1990].
Anibal 5 [2 volumes, 1990-92], art George Bess. A randy cyborg adventurer - a sort of 'Steve Austin-Powers', if you will - battles the evil organisation known as "Interterror". English translation trade paperback of first volume published by Heavy Metal [1997]

The Metabarons [7 volumes, 1992-2002], art Juan Giminez. Tracing the family history of The Metabaron - a supporting character from The Incal - this is a beautiful, passionate, jaw-dropping epic that spans generations and firmly puts the "opera" back into space opera. A segment appeared in the July 1995 issue of Heavy Metal magazine. It is currently serialised in the US comics format by Humanoids, with two trade-paperback collections [Path of the Warrior and Blood and Steel] now available.
The Madwoman of the Sacred Heart [3 volumes, 1993-1994], art Moebius. An academia-set satire on sex and religion; a university professor becomes embroiled in a cult that believes his foxy student

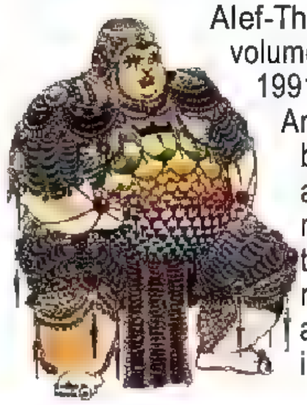
Click on Globe returns to contents

lover - the daughter of a Columbian druglord - will give birth to the reincarnation of John The Baptist. Unlikely to get a mention in the Vatican's Approved Book List, an English edition containing the first two volumes was published in 1986 by Dark Horse Comics.
Son of the Gun [4 volumes, 1995-1999], art George Bess. A blood-soaked tale of redemption set in South America. The first volume - for which Jodorowsky was awarded the prestigious Angoulême "l'Alph'art" prize for Best Script in 1996 - was recently published in a hardcover French-style album by Humanoids.
Angel Claw [1995], art Moebius. A series of illustrations by Moebius, depicting all manner of – ahem - fruity shenanigans and accompanied by Jodorowsky's musings on sex, death and, uh, sexy death. Firmly putting the BD into Bande Dessinee, it's enough to make Eric Stanton blush. English-language edition published in hardcover [naturally enough] by NBM in 1996.
The Technopriests [4 volumes, 1998-2001], art Zoran Janjetov. Set within "The Jodoverse", this tells the story of the idealistic Albino and his brutal initiation into the Pan-Techno Guild. It features eye-popping art by Janjetov and colourist Fred Beltran, and is published in three hardcover French-style albums by Humanoids.
Megalex [2 volumes, 1999-present], art by Fred Beltran. Rebels fight a war of resistance against a grim and sterile technopia. Featuring breathtaking art, it is due to be serialised in Humanoids' forthcoming English-language version of the legendary Metal Hurlant magazine.
After The Incal [2000-present], art Moebius. Jodorowsky & Moebius were reunited for this eagerly awaited sequel. The entire Incal saga is currently being serialised by Humanoids Publishing [see entry for The Incal].

Comics currently unavailable in English

With Humanoids Publishing actively releasing classic European comics to the English-speaking market, there is every possibility than many of these books will soon be translated. Titles originally published by Les Humanoides Associes unless otherwise indicated.

Fabulas Panicas [1965-1970], art Jodorowsky. Weekly comic-strip that appeared in the Mexican newspaper *El Heraldo*.
Anibal 5 [1966], art by Manuel Moro. Jodorowsky's first appearance in European comics, subsequently revisited and redrawn by Bess [see listing under Comics: English language Editions]. Published by Editions Novaro.



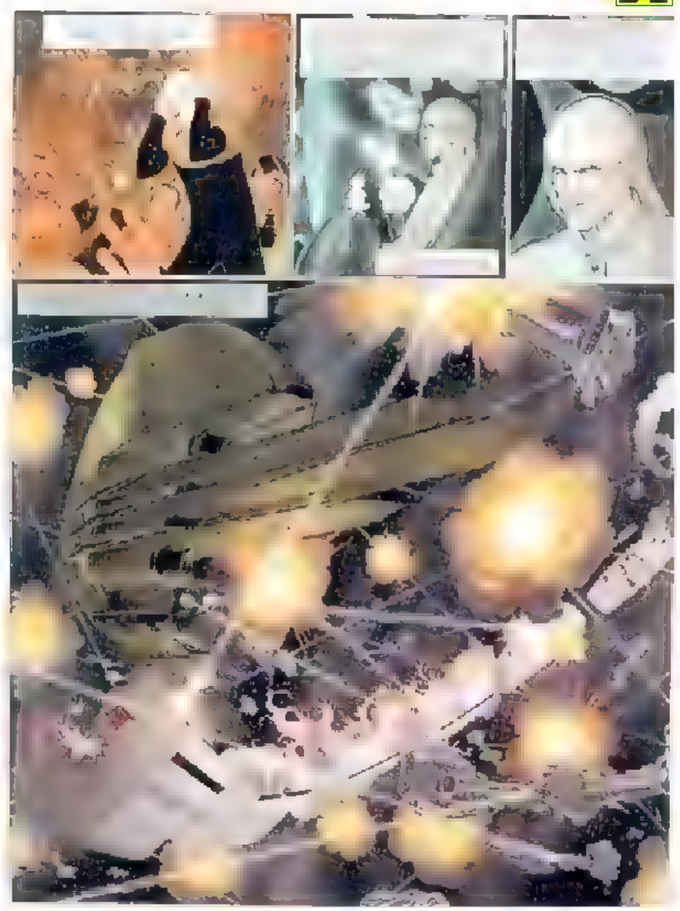
Alef-Thau [8 volumes, 1983-1991], art by Arno. A hero born without arms or legs must gain these missing appendages in order to rescue a beautiful Princess from the clutches of Evil. Think *Shrek* meets *Born on the Fourth of July*. Sadly, Arno died before the completion of the saga, so the eighth and final volume was illustrated by Covial.
Moon-Face [2 volumes, 1992-97], art by Francois Boucq. The island of Damanuestra is ruled by a dictator, in the grip of a rather brutal religious revival and about to be submerged by a tidal wave. Can a mute, crater-faced child be its only hope? Published by Casterman.
The Passion of Diosamante [2 volumes, 1994-2002], art by Jean-Claude Gal. A beautiful queen forsakes her worldly goods to embark on a spiritual quest.
Polar Extremes [1995], art by Durandur. The adventures of Gilles Hamesh - a low-rent private eye.
Aliot [1996], art by Victor de la Fuente. A mystical story cancelled after one volume for mysterious reasons. Published by Dargaud.
The Treasure of the Shadows [1999], art by Francois Boucq. Technically not a comic, but a collection of poems with accompanying illustrations.
One-Armed Bouncer [1 volume, 2001-present], art by Francois Boucq. A tale of war and banditry set in the Old West.

[In addition to his comic works, Jodorowsky has also written many novels, plays and non-fiction books.]

Filmography

The Transposed Heads [1959?]; *Fando And Lis* [1967];*El Topo* [1970]; *The Holy Mountain* [1973]; *Tusk* [1973] ; *Santa Sangre* [1989]; *The Rainbow Thief* [1990]; *Abelcain* [2003?]
[A Region 0 DVD of *Fando and Lis* was recently released containing the documentary *The Jodorowsky Constellation* – which is also available on PAL video]. *Santa Sangre* [recommended] and *The Rainbow Thief* [in Jodorowsky's words: "I hated it."] are available on NTSC.

BL



THE FILM OF ONE BAD RAT

BRYAN Talbot's classic graphic novel **The Tale of One Bad Rat**, about a talented teenager's struggle to regain her sense of self-worth and her freedom from an abusive childhood, is to become a feature-length movie - at the hands of another comics artist.

The story has been procured by Fat Dragon Productions, a film production company headed by artist Tom Lyle and his artist/writer wife Susan Paris Lyle.

The graphic novel has been published by Dark Horse Comics in nine countries, and has been on continual release since 1995.

It has won awards including the prestigious Eisner Award, the Comic Creator's Guild award, two UK Comic awards, and the American Parent's Choice award.

In 1998 it made the *New York Times* annual list of recommended reading. It is found as a set text in schools, universities, and in children's counselling centers in Britain, Finland, France, Germany and North America.

Tom Lyle is writing the screenplay adaptation, and Fat Dragon predicts a 2003 production date. Lyle has been in the comics field for 15 years and is known for his portrayals of Spider-Man, Batman, Robin and the *Total Recall* comic book.

Richard O'Brien - Riff Raff in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* - has already been cast as Sir Noel Tod, one of the featured secondary characters in **The Tale of One Bad Rat**. Tod is a politician who happens upon the heroine, Helen, in London. He drunkenly tries to flirt with her but she is saved by a streetgang - leading Tod to launch a campaign for better law and order.

The graphic novel is a multi-layered masterpiece. Much of it explores the nature of rats and Helen's fascination with them, and also Beatrix Potter, on whose *Tale of Two Good Mice* the title of Talbot's novel seems to be based.

But the central theme is the abuse Helen has suffered at the hands of her own family members - and her attempt to grow past it. In his introduction to the book, Stephen Gallagher explains the connection: "Ever since we lived in caves, we had to demonise something out there; and after a while, it's as if the demons are the only truth we can know.

"So how do you handle it, then, if you happen to be brought up in an atmosphere of certainty that the demon is you?

"That's how it can be when you're a child if the adults in your life can't be relied upon, and they seem to get some consolation out of projecting their inadequacies onto you.

"Bad rats, all."

The motion picture industry - or at least its critics - is beginning to get a reputation for mistreatment of graphic novel works; look at the way *From Hell* has been pilloried in certain quarters because it was "based on a comic".

This adaptation of a comic featuring one of the most adult of subjects could be the acid test for comic adaptations to come.

Let's hope this rat doesn't turn out to be a turkey. BL

ZA MANGA – MANGA FROM Z TO A

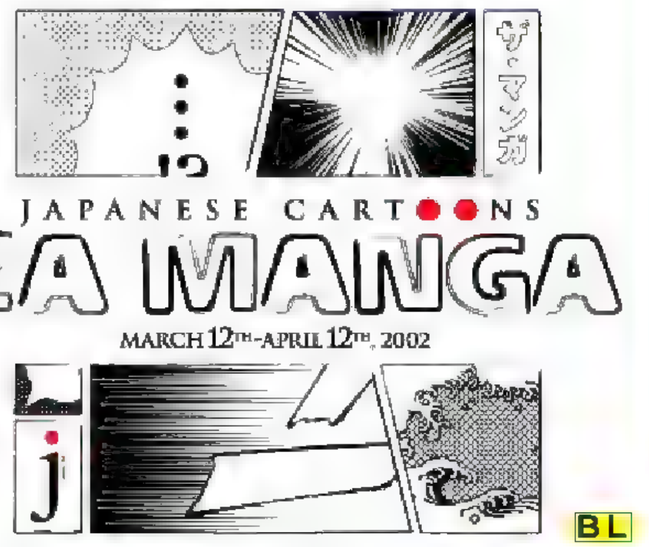
AN exhibition of 5,000 manga books and other associated events will take place at the Magma Bookshop Gallery, 117-119 Clerkenwell Road, London EC1, England from March 12th to April 12th.

Organiser and curator Marilyn Yamada explains, "This exhibition will show the development of Japanese manga, from their roots in the Chojugiga (Animal Caricature Scrolls) that were produced between the mid-twelfth and mid-thirteenth century, to the present, when manga has become recognized throughout the world as an integral part of Japanese culture.

"Simultaneously, the exhibition will demonstrate the influence and power manga has over Japanese society, present in every field from animations to games, sports goods and even academic study. However, we also hope that it will present the viewer with the opportunity to enjoy excellent examples of manga as pure entertainment."

To help round out that sense of entertainment the exhibition space will offer to the public many manga related items, some of them interactive. A manga-based SEGA game will be available to be played on CD-ROM, and visitors can try their hand at drawing manga themselves, using some of the drawing tools popular with Japanese artists. Besides the large selection of manga books, data concerning pricing, distribution and the Japanese Ministry of Education's proposals concerning manga will be available for perusal. A special section on the history of manga and anime has been created, and a film documentary on manga will be shown. Examples of manga use in advertising and promotion, including of dolls representing the Japanese Prime Minster, will also be on display.

For full details ring Za Manga on 020 7242 9503 or check the websites *www.zamanga.com* and *www.magmabooks.com*



BL

BURNING DOWN THE CURTAIN

It's all change in DC's Top Chair. Rich Johnston looks to the future...

"Having spent enough time in my life as a fan journalist digging for information, I can safely say that, if there's anybody who deserves to be tortured by fan journalists digging for information today, I probably should head the list!" - Paul Levitz

THIS month, Paul Levitz was promoted from Executive Vice President And Publisher to President of DC Comics, taking the position from Jenette Kahn. Word is that Kahn was pushed out due to an inability to negotiate successfully with TV and movie people. Dan DiDio, with plenty of Hollywood contacts, was moved in as Vice President a week before Kahn's announced resignation. DiDio's previous position at DC was as co-writer of Superboy. In hindsight, it was a clear "preparation" move but the Levitz promotion took almost all DC staff members by surprise.

Levitz has also taken on all of Kahn's remaining responsibilities and added them to his own job description. This has been seen by DC sources as a planned coup on Levitz' part, creating for himself a greater power base at DC and letting him bring friends in to take over the positions of those who might have diluted that base. Levitz' rise through the ranks has been a dream one.

From prominent fanboy and fanzine creator to DC Comics freelancer and editor, Levitz made a name for himself by being unobtrusive, by being in the right place at the right time and by taking advantage of opportunities that have come his way; far more the Machiavellian model than the loud, abrasive Bill Jemas at Marvel. Levitz is credited with the very survival of DC Comics when it was bought out, negotiating a position within new owner Warner Brothers' hierarchy, away from magazine publishing and into licensing. As a result, the profit model is different, the company has less pressure to perform, and so it can explore what it publishes with greater ease. The publication of lines like Piranha, Paradox, Vertigo and recently the Will Eisner Library has been made possible by that one act by Levitz. He's also believed to have performed similar contortionist feats when AOL merged with Time Warner. Without Levitz' actions in these cases, DC Comics would be a very different beast, if it still existed at all.

One thing that has dogged Levitz of late has been The Authority. Warren Ellis and Bryan Hitch revitalised a concept they had explored in their critically acclaimed Stormwatch series; they used main characters with seriously questionable ethics and told the graphically explicit story of a dictatorially fascist team of superheroes. This gained some criticism, but it sold far beyond anything Wildstorm had predicted for it. It was known within DC when they bought Wildstorm that The Authority wasn't exactly their kind of property. But as Levitz has stated, he has no problem publishing a comic he doesn't personally like so long as it serves an audience. With the assignment of Mark Millar and Frank Quitely to the title however, this was going to change. They played up the love interest between Midnighter and Apollo, The Authority's version of Batman and Superman, and it brought media attention. A stolen kiss between the pair featured prominently in newspapers across the world, including the front pages of a few respected British broadsheets.

On the back of this, at least one store in London saw all their copies wiped out in an afternoon when the local gay community decided to see what all the fuss was about. Sales rocketed; The Authority soon became Wildstorm's best selling title, and outsold almost all of DC's regular titles as well. It's one thing publishing a book you don't personally like. It's another thing entirely to publish a book you don't personally like that outsells Batman...

At a time when DC were fearful about the possibility of losing both Superman and Batman to other sections of Warner Brothers where the characters could be exploited more efficiently, the attention was unwanted. DC took more notice of The Authority's content, and the censors started to cut. And cut and change they certainly did. A single unobtrusive gay kiss was removed from an Authority spinoff, the editor raged in public against the decision, and saw his position threatened as a result.

From that moment on all eyes were on The Authority and, issue after issue, more changes were made. The events of September 2001 gave DC the perfect opportunity to attack the book ruthlessly. Recent issues, already incredibly late, saw panel after panel neutered and cut - scenes that were deemed acceptable in other published books in the line were excised from The Authority. It seemed to be the sexuality in The Authority that was the problem - scenes that would have been published if "straight" were cut if they were in anyway "other".

And while this may be specifically related to the characters in question being analogues of Batman and Superman, it would not be the first time that Levitz caused controversy in this area. As writer of Legion of Superheroes, he was known to have "clarified" the sexuality of the character Element Lad, believed by both creators and fans to be gay, by giving him a girlfriend.

The Authority's treatment demonstrates a distinct difference between Marvel and DC. If Marvel had such a book on their schedule getting that kind of attention, they'd have exploited it to the max. DC, however, preferred to do everything in their power to kill The Authority, first with the death of a thousand cuts, then with a big sledgehammer to its head. One wonders exactly how Frank Miller managed to get away with far more liberties in his recent Dark Knight Strikes Again - but that's another story entirely. And one I hope to be able to tell some day.

Another of Levitz' battles of late has been over upstart publisher CrossGen. It's been known that he's frowned upon creators leaving DC books to move to CrossGen, and a number of completed projects featuring those talents have been scrapped or restarted from scratch as a result. In some cases where creators have completed work and had it accepted by DC editorial, only to see it scrapped, those creators have been required to repay advance payments made for that work - though CrossGen has been known to pay that amount on behalf of the creators.

Paul Levitz is the man at the top of DC now. He's reached the heights that, as a mere fanboy, he could only have dreamed of, and under his rule, DC Comics has prospered. But how much does power corrupt? Will Levitz move to shape comics in his own image? With blow after blow being delivered by Marvel as they drain talent, attention and readers, can a few occasional victories stop Levitz being kneecapped in his prime? Ironically, considering the strides that DC has taken to move the comic book form onwards, there currently seems to be a battle between the conservative legacy there and the progressive trends at Marvel and CrossGen.

BL

ISSUES

Carol Close defends the role of the columnist

"A HORRIBLY childish/fan girlish screed which didn't do anybody associated with it any favours" is how one poster over at the Warren Ellis Forum described my column in **Borderline #6**. The "screed" in question was the one where I named what I considered to be the worst comics of 2001. If you didn't read it my nominations included such gems as J. Michael Straczynski's **Amazing Spider-Man #36** (Marvel's take on 9/11), Garth Ennis's **Just A Pilgrim** miniseries, Joe Casey's **Uncanny X-Men**, and **Alias** by Brian Michael Bendis.

Now, I couldn't care less what some inbred Ellis lackey from Lickspittle, Idaho thinks of me, or what I write here, but I was nevertheless interested by the comments as they seemed to imply that a columnist or critic must always be fair, polite and balanced to those it targets for discussion (or, indeed, destruction).

Sorry, but that *so* isn't the role of a columnist.

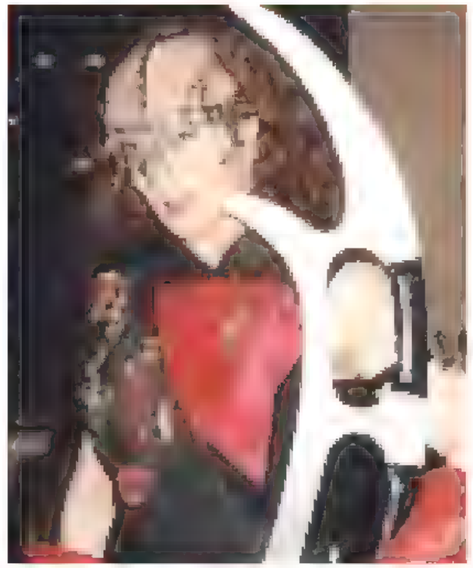
As far as I'm concerned a columnist's job is to amuse and annoy, to instigate argument, to be an irritant, to prick pomposity, to make trouble and, generally, to raise a little hell. In short, I'm here to entertain and provoke, not to soothe the fractured egos of comics writers or their adoring puppy dog minions. Fairness, balance and deference just don't

come into it, I'm afraid. If I think something sucks, I say so. If you don't like what I say or the way in which I say it, well, the next page is just one click away and don't let the door hit you in the arse on the way out.

One thing I want to make clear, though, is that, despite my fairly full-blooded criticisms of some of their work, I have nothing against any of the writers in question. Straczynski's run on **Amazing Spider-Man** has got me reading and enjoying the title again for the first time in years (his other projects **Rising Stars** and **Midnight Nation** are also regular visitors to Casa Close). Ennis, meanwhile, gave us **Preacher**, to my mind the finest mainstream comic of the last six or seven years, while Bendis's **Goldfish**, **Torso** and **Fire** have helped push crime comics firmly back into the spotlight after years in the wilderness. But just because these writers have produced great work previously doesn't give them any kind of critical immunity if they screw up or fumble the ball. In truth, I'm disappointed in them. Disappointed that Bendis has opted to stop producing riveting crime noir to engage in the thoroughly pointless task of re-writing Spider-Man's history (like he could improve on those Lee/Ditko/Romita stories on the best day of his life). Disappointed that Ennis has followed **Preacher** and **Hitman** with **Fury** and **Just A** Bloody **Pilgrim**. Disappointed that Straczynski jumped aboard the September 11 bandwagon so readily and that the tale he told was so syrupy and logic-defyingly awful. It does our medium no favours that some of its best writers are allowed to get away with work that is so under-whelming. And, let's face it, if sour-faced, miserable old witches like me don't point this stuff out and take them to task, then who is going to? *Wizard*? The members of Brian Michael Bendis's online discussion forum?

Part of the problem is that comics are discussed so rarely in

3 kinds of fanboy/ girls



the media of the "real world" and therefore avoid the occasionally harsh critical glare that creators and fans of films, books, plays and music are by now well used to. In other words comics are often only ever reviewed by comics fans in magazines and on websites pitched exclusively at other comics fans. And, this being something of an embattled medium suffering from a lack of sales and a lack of respect, it doesn't take a genius to work out that honest-to-goodness kick-arse criticism is going to be in pretty short supply amongst writers who see it as part of their job to be consistently positive about the industry and those who work within it (and that's without even mentioning the fact that most comics journalists secretly harbour ambitions to be comics writers, so are unlikely to bite the hand that might one day feed). Indeed, when the usually anodyne *Comics International* stuck its head above the parapet and declared **The Defenders** to be "the worst comic ever published" there was an instant furore - as if a respected industry mag offering up a take-no-prisoners negative opinion has the same kind of novelty value as discovering a tap-dancing cow with three heads on Oxford Street.

That one *CI* incident apart, it never fails to amaze me just how much goodwill fans and supposed journalists are prepared to extend to mediocre work and how much they're prepared to indulge its creators. It's little wonder that comics are considered such a low art when our critical faculties are so impaired by a refusal to see writers as anything other than creative geniuses, while slapping down those that seek to offer a different and less flattering perspective. It does no-one any favours: the fans are cheated because it means writers can get away with producing average work knowing full well it will be lapped up anyway, the industry suffers because new readers turned on by **Preacher** or **Torso** are unlikely to stick around long after checking out **Tangled Web: The Thousand** or **Ultimate Team-Up**, and the writers themselves stagnate because there's no-one prepared to tell them when their material is weak, repetitive or just downright dreadful.

And that is why the likes of me are worth a thousand toadying forum dwellers any day of the week. I give it to you straight, have a perfectly successful career outside of the comics industry and have no desire to genuflect in the presence of the bloke who writes, giggle, **Ultimate Spider-Man**. You should treasure me, really you should.

BL

THE BLANK PAGE

Chev gets down and dirty... In the Ghetto

I'VE been writing these columns for six months now and I'm quite painfully aware that not one of them has actually had anything positive to say about the industry. But I've taken a cold, hard look at previous columns in order to ascertain why that might be. I believe I have discovered the reason.

I have written exclusively about American superhero comics. Anything positive I had to say about them I have relegated to the reviews section, focussing here on the machinations behind the façade of the comic story itself. I am interested in how the writer's vision survives the path from conception through the collaborative process with the artist and the editor, until we, the audience, finally get to read the finished product in whatever form - compromised or otherwise - it is published in. Most often, however, I consider that the writer has been compromised; hence, the negativity of this page.

Now, I don't mind writing about these comics; they are the ones I choose to read, after all. I have rarely had any interest in reading fiction originally written in anything other than English, and most of my tastes tend towards the fantastic, whether in science fiction, crime thrillers or even, to an extent, general fiction. So, I may as happily read a **Spider-Man** or **Hellblazer** comic as an issue of **Finder** or **Stray Bullets**. If your tastes differ, there are plenty of other columns within this and other issues of **Borderline** to cater for you, from Japanese manga to European and South American comics. And those columns are far more positive, both in content and intent, primarily due to the publishers involved and how they differ from companies like Marvel and DC.

Large American comic publishers are, on the whole, fundamentally stupid, preferring to licence their characters to other media rather than work to make their lines something worthwhile in themselves. While every other non-English speaking country gets on with the business of printing comics in the same way that they print books and newspapers (and for largely the same audience), we in Britain and Australia are held in the thrall of American comics publishers and their outstanding examples of rank idiocy.

An irritating side effect of this is that many independent and self-published comics from the States are ghettoised through no fault of their own. While many of them survive not only on the basis of their comics sales but also on a well-developed system of constantly in-print trade paperbacks, they do so largely within the comic shop distribution system, which is almost entirely patronised by people who are only there to buy comics in the first place (and most of them superhero comics, it must be said). Comic shops are not similar to bookshops; they are more akin to a specialist outlet such as a stamp shop or a sex shop - generally tucked away on a side road apart from the main shopping area - where people sharing that interest go specifically for a particular service. They are, in this respect, an almost unattractive proposition for anyone wishing to explore the possibilities of comics, whether the generic use of mainstream superheroes or the verisimilitude of the independent publishers. In this way, those comics concentrating on crime, S.F. and general fiction - which, in truth, are the ones that may attract and keep the interest of the adult reader looking for something to supplement their more normal diet of movies and books - are penalised by connotation with the gaudy and perennially staid genre with which the US industry is primarily associated.

In Britain, despite having home grown comic creators - many of whom write the majority of the quality Marvel and DC comics - not to mention publishers, and a distribution system still catering to newsstand customers, we find that comics are relegated to speciality stores. Even though outside North America no one needed the Direct Market to survive, we have had to endure the ramifications of the changes that US comics made. There are few comics in newsagents where kids can see them, so much so that they consider comics extinct. There are few comic shops in high street locations where anybody can see them, to the extent that their relocation to back streets renders them all but invisible, and even stigmatised. And there are few comics on those shelves that can fight their way past the stacks of Marvel and DC product in order to gain the attention of passing trade. Which is to say, most people don't know comics are still being produced, wouldn't know where to find them in any case, and could be forgiven for thinking that comics only featured superheroes anyway.

Comics fans, apart from being trapped in a ghetto we never made, are also a captive audience. All of the big companies' bluster about this and that promotion intended to garner new readers is not only patronising, it is not based on any sort of fact. The **Ultimate** titles, originally devised to attract a new audience, barely exist outside comic shops, in either sales terms or presence. The sales facts and figures bandied about for **The Dark Knight Strikes Again** hardly belie the evidence that being the best-selling comic book for any particular month (and not by that much of a margin at that) means nothing outside of the comic community. That **Fray** and **Midnight Nation** are selling in infinitesimal numbers compared to television viewing figures for shows by the same creators has no bearing on the fact that their comic sales are still considered respectable.

So, that's it for us, the audience. So what prompts people to want to write comics anyway? The same reason that drives screenwriters to carry on even as their latest script is gangbanged by idiot directors and producers before showing in some fleapit in Buttmunch, Arkansas. The answer is always the same; love.

There - that's a positive thought.

Isn't it?

BL

LEARNING CURVES

Sarah Littlehales speculates to accumulate

A New Day

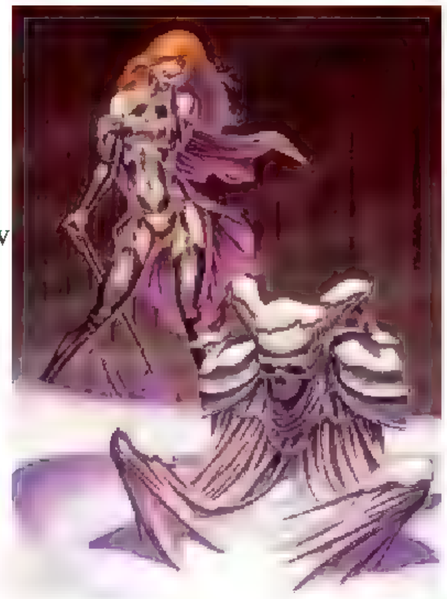
BOUND by the chains of heaven and by the thorned roses of hell, the beautiful, curvaceous and red-headed goddess Dawn has always been immensely popular, even before she appeared in her own comics.

Famously conceived by the idle doodling hand of Joseph Michael Linsner, **Dawn** originally started life as a lingerie design. While bored at a convention Linsner penned out an interlocking skull pattern, which then turned into a lacy feminine garment, and in turn developed into the much adored goddess. Ever since then she's been popping up all over the place in a variety of guises, but always distinguishable by the three teardrop marking below her left eye.

Some of her more recent outings onto the printed page have not exactly been leaping from the shelves. Stories such as the 1999 4-part series **Dawn: Return of the Goddess** contain more of Linsner's luscious art, and as such it is a shame that its sales paled in comparison to her earlier and more expensive outings.

Dawn's first comics appearance was as hostess in a couple of anthology titles, **Cry for Dawn** (Cry for Dawn Productions) and **Crypt of Dawn** (Sirius Entertainment). These are without a doubt the most sought after Dawn comics, despite the fact that she only appears on the cover then guides the reader through a couple of stories; the only real connection to her was the use of her name in the title. It took five years after **Cry for Dawn** for the Goddess to actually make her first starring role, in the one shot **Drama**.

Despite the lack of any real appearance by Dawn in **Cry for Dawn** traders can still manage to fetch anywhere between fifty and a hundred dollars for a first print copy. Not bad when you can pick up the Angry Christ Comix trade paperback containing the best material from **Cry for Dawn**. From there the rest of the one shots, specials and miniseries can start to



set you back something in the region of a couple of hundred dollars. So it's definitely best to pick up a trade paperback where and when you see it, or stop by Linsner's own website with your credit card at the ready, because those early individual issues are scooped up by the hardcore Dawn fans in the blink of a three-teared eye.

Being Frank...

...we all know that Miller's work on **Dark Knight Strikes Again** is not his best to date. We have all awaited the sequel to the highly praised **Dark Knight Returns**, and most of us are a little disappointed; evidently so, judging by the scores of copies still piled up on the shelves of comic shops. The standards set by **Sin City** have slipped over recent years to the point where the *Hell and Back* series took us to Hell but forgot to bring us Back.

Well, why wouldn't we be disappointed? The point is that we've grown up with Miller's work on Batman and Daredevil in particular. His once-revolutionary work, teaming strangely rough and practical pencils with a gritty approach to story telling, helped to redefine the flagging **Daredevil** ongoing series.

Despite the immense disappointment of recent months, his work is still revered as classic. It's always worth picking up **Batman: Year One**, or **Daredevil: Man Without Fear**, or issues 168 to 191 of the ongoing **DD** series, in which he introduced the extremely popular Elektra, or his early **Sin City** stuff, not forgetting the five issue series **300** from Dark Horse. Prices should be tumbling down to the stage where it's cheaper to pick up the individual issues instead of the trade paperback. Well, that's hardly surprising in the case of **300**, since the issues go for only a couple of dollars apiece while the hard cover collection is a mere snip at thirty dollars...

Better than Harry Potter?

One thing's for certain, he's been around longer than the young Mr Potter. While J.K. Rowling was still using any piece of scrap paper she could get her hands on to pen the adventures of an adolescent, dark haired, thick-brim-spectacled English schoolboy wizard, there was already Tim Hunter... an adolescent, dark haired, thick-brim-spectacled English school boy. True enough that the similarity between Potter and Hunter has already been spotted by **Books of Magic** (and everything else) author Neil Gaiman, but perhaps the indisputable success of Harry has helped the recent success of his comics predecessor.

The Books of Magic miniseries and ongoing series, while now complete and readily available in trade paperbacks, are once again becoming collectable. The new series **Hunter: The Age of Magic** has helped to reanimate sales of the old series, and shows just what happens to a young magician when he grows up.

The true difference is that you can read this without some strange child walking up to you and telling you how the story ends... thank God for Vertigo's "Mature Readers" label. BL

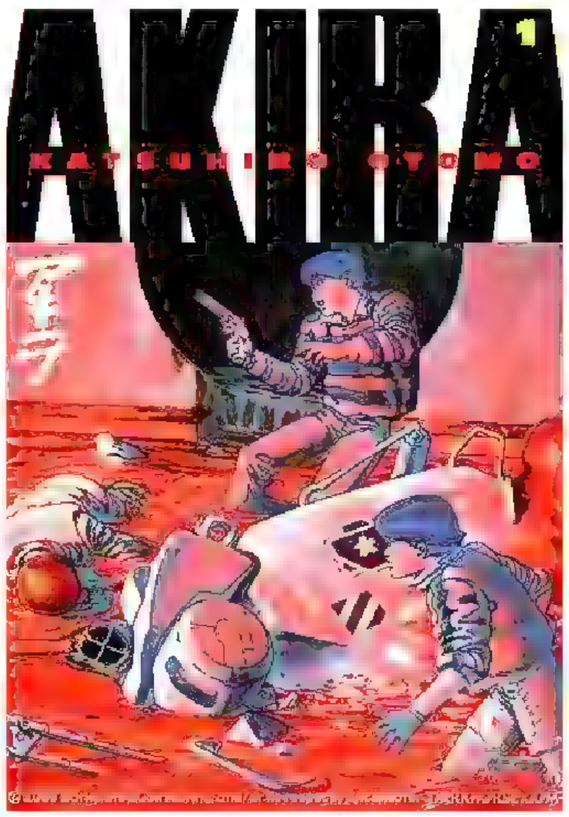
WHAT IS MANGA?

Kevin Hill looks at a key manga – Katsuhiro Otomo's Akira

IT had to be done. It can't be avoided. Everyone knows about it. Why keep quiet about it?

We're close to the release of Dark Horse Comics' final collected volume of what must be one of the most well-known Japanese comics in the Western world - at least in the English speaking parts of it. While it is primarily known as the animated movie that helped start the "anime" boom in the early 90s, it all started with a comic. A big comic.

Originally published throughout the 80s in Kodansha's **Young Magazine** anthology, Katsuhiro Otomo's paranormal sci-fi epic **Akira** has found its way to Dark Horse via an unusual route. When it was originally adopted by Marvel Comics in the late 80s and released as part of their Epic imprint, the unusual step of colouring the artwork was taken in an attempt to make the story more palatable for American readers. Thankfully Marvel employed Steve Oliff to undertake the chore of coating Otomo's sumptuous line work with all manner of shades, which - thanks to his use of a computer colouring process - gave the book an unusual, and in some ways more visually stunning, look - a look that many modern comics seek to achieve, but often fail to match.

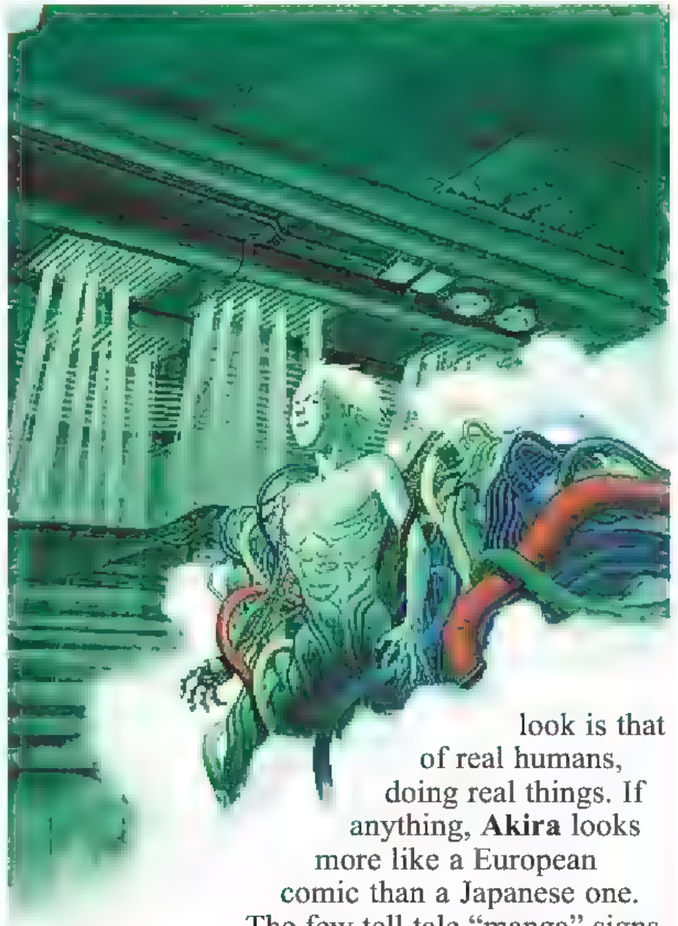


During the "anime" boom, caused in part by the movie version of **Akira**, a UK-based comic that partially modelled itself on the Japanese anthologies appeared. That magazine was **Manga Mania**, and in making the decision to run Akira as part of its line-up, it made the bold move of retaining the mostly black and white format, only running a limited number of Marvel's colour pages. Eventually the colour pages were dropped completely, and the series was left to run until the end.

Now we have Dark Horse Comics' version. They have opted to release the books in a similar format to those released by Kodansha - six nice and chunky volumes in black and white, except for the painted pages produced by Otomo for the original series. They have also persuaded Studio Proteus - the guys responsible for most, if not all, of Dark Horse's manga line - to produce a brand new translation.

That's the history lesson then. So, what is **Akira** about? Well, in many ways it's about evolution. Man's next step. To quote the trailer for the animated movie, "Neo-Tokyo is about to explode". Otomo introduces most of the main cast - the characters who will shape the story - within the first book. Others come and go, but at its heart are a chosen few: Kaneda, the brash young biker, and charismatic leader of a gang; Tetsuo, one of Kaneda's gang members, a weak-willed biker who wishes to be Kaneda; Kei, a member of a resistance cell hoping to make fools of the government by revealing the existence of Akira - a sweet child with unimaginable power; and The Colonel, an unnamed leader of men and controller of the project that was originally responsible for Akira - and, it turns out, the destruction of a vast amount of Tokyo. With the destruction of Tokyo comes a new city - Neo-Tokyo, a more brutal Tokyo and on the verge of collapse - the perfect setting for what amounts to more than an action adventure.

Akira is also a study of social climate, of change, of paranoia - and power. Lots of power. Most of this power lies in the hands of children, who were altered in an experiment to stimulate the psychic abilities inherent within humans. The project's greatest success led to its destruction, with the creation of the child Akira. Now the reopened project has a new patient, Tetsuo - a young boy, a weak one at that, given power to match that of Akira. The result is chaos. Stunningly portrayed chaos, as Neo-Tokyo follows the way of old Tokyo, with Tetsuo losing control of his powers - or rather, with the powers outgrowing his mind.



Artistically **Akira** is rarely less than stunning. From the cityscape of Neo-Tokyo down to the sewers and up into the old Olympic stadium, the quality of the artwork rarely - if ever - drops. Whether complex backgrounds or technically superb renderings of vehicles, nothing is half finished or half imagined. Unlike in most Japanese comics, the characters themselves are often realistic. Yes, they still have big eyes, and sometimes the gaping "broken-jaw" mouths, but essentially their look is that of real humans, doing real things. If anything, **Akira** looks more like a European comic than a Japanese one.

The few tell tale "manga" signs are the aforementioned facial characteristics, and the speed lines. Well, technically there aren't a *few* speed lines, there are a *lot* of them, but with so many action-packed scenes throughout the series absent speed lines would be sorely missed.

To sum up: yes, **Akira** is a great book, maybe even the greatest science fiction comic ever created. Maybe. In terms of Japanese comics, it ranks alongside **Lone Wolf & Cub** as a must read, but obviously only if you like your science fiction fast, violent, and truly exciting. Oh, and watch out for the end of volume three; it's a fine example of Otomo's skill at writing a serialised comic. BL

MAN ON A MISSION

Martin Shipp's vision of a better comics industry

MEMORY. Does funny things to a man.

Last month, myself and at least one of my columnar chums here had harsh words for the very poor comic book **Amazing Spider-Man #36**, the infamous World Trade Center issue. We didn't plan to gang up on it, we just all had the same spooky morphic resonance-style feeling about the book and we went about decrying it in our own individual styles.

Well, a few months later the title picks up on the cliff-hanger that was #35 and almost makes up for the whole #36 thing and really there should be one of those big red flashing neon SPOILER WARNING things right about here, but I reckon that if you care that much about a comicbook you've probably read it by now, right?

Doddery old Aunt May Parker has found out that her weedy nephew Peter is really the Amazing Spider-Man. World sighs with relief, cries of "about bloody time", etc. But the thing is... I

always thought she knew anyway. Not in the "blimey, how daft *is* the old bat not to notice the bruises, the broken ribs, the six arms?" way. Not in the "oh, of course she knows but if she tells him he'll be all upset and she wouldn't want *that* to happen", explain-it-all-away, make-up-your-own-continuity way. No.

I always thought she knew because once, when I was very young, I read a Spider-Man story during which Aunt May says, straight to Peter's face, something along the lines of "Don't you think this would be a job for Spider-Man?" and off he goes, thinking something along the lines of "Yep, Aunt May sure was right!" Sounds like it was written by Stan Lee, so it must have been some time in the 1960s. I must have been reading in the womb, or possibly in a previous incarnation.

Obviously this didn't happen; I read no such comicbook because (unless somebody can prove me wrong and in a way I sincerely hope somebody can) it never existed except inside my head.

Another example: I can clearly remember the cover of the first four colour American comicbook I ever read. It had Plastic Man on it, doing something Plastic Mannish, and this is probably why I have an enduring love for Plastic Man even now, yea even unto forking out ridiculous amounts of moolah for those Archive hardbacks. And yet, if I dig that

—it's called Bigfoot

issue out of a back issue bin, I realise that this could not possibly be the first four colour American comicbook I ever read; at the time it was published I was at least eleven years old and had, as my family will quite happily tell you (though possibly with *that* look in their eye), been reading comics for a good few years.

As examples of False Memory, these are preferable to remembering that Uncle Henry was having regular sex with your pet bunny rabbit, though not as saleable to Sunday newspapers. But why should they be there at all? Science, bless it, has showed that the olfactory sense is the one most strongly connected to memory; a certain perfume can bring bittersweet

recollections of a long-past summer and the smell of frying bacon can remind a vegetarian just how stupid they are. [*I resent that remark - Ed.*] Maybe the musty, old-changing-roomy smell of old paper can transport you to... well, to the last time you went to a comic shop. But my Imaginary Spider-Man wasn't there in the first place, so how could I be reminded of it?

The only way I can explain this (if it needs explaining at all; perhaps it'd be best left mysterious, like Bigfoot or Neil Gaiman) is to give you an analogy. You know how you can hear a song and it reminds you of another song? For example: I can never hear *Kid* by The Pretenders (a heartbreaking song when you know what the subject really is) without being reminded of a cheesy old lounge song called *More* (a song so bland I couldn't tell you who recorded it if you put a gun in my mouth). There's probably about three notes in common between the two songs; a musician could probably tell you that three notes is a pretty low correspondence. [*Yes - Production Ed.*]

Couldn't this correspondence of notes - or in the case of comics, of dialogue or images - occur as a similar phenomenon on the page? A sequence of visuals that unintentionally - we're not talking about "homage" or "with apologies to" or "after" here - drags something quite different up from the back of the memory? If we're accepting that concept, is it such a giant leap to the next stage; that of the conflation, within the subconscious, of the two discrete

sequences into one new but fabricated "memory" of an event that didn't happen?

Tell you what: I'll try to find out before we next meet and I'll tell you then. Unless you're Oliver Sacks and can tell me before then. Or unless you're Aunt May, and can tell me that yes, you knew all the time and that you just lied about it to those people who wrote the comic about your Peter. BL

COMICS MILESTONES

Mike Kidson continues his exploration of key moments in the history of comicbooks

Comics without Pictures?

A great deal of ink has been deployed over the years in attempts to define what a comic actually *is*; but no general consensus on the subject has yet been reached. Most definitions, however, place an emphasis on defining the medium according to how it communicates. Does a comic necessarily include words as dialogue placed within speech balloons? How does the eye alternate between reading the words and reading the images? How closely connected in sequence must the pictures be? Are words even a requirement? Such questions also take two assumptions for granted – that the methodology of art criticism is the appropriate route towards definition (implying that comics is an artform), and that while a comic may not necessarily involve words, it *must* consist of a sequence of pictures.

But comics is not just an artform - it is a *commercial* artform, examples of which are generally sold in multiple copies primarily for the profit of the publisher, to whom the artist is often a hireling. The same can be said of books, of course; but what is a book, other than a set of printed sheets of paper bound together? There's a dichotomy between the *content* of books or comics and the books or comics as *physical objects* – and any definition of comics concerning itself primarily with the content may be doing scant justice to the *format*. And if we consider the format, the comic begins to resemble a consumer good prepared for a mass market; if its content may have something in common with the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, its format may more closely be related to canned food.

So, what happens if we consider definition of comics in terms of format and production methods? In some instances it's possible to do so and arrive at some surprising conclusions; for instance, that a comic may not contain any kind of sequential pictures at all. Take British comics as an example. In formatting terms, the traditional British mainstream comic may be described as "an inexpensive weekly publication for juveniles, typically consisting of a combination of stories, articles, educational features and quizzes". When Alfred Harmsworth launched the British comics boom with **Comic Cuts** (1890), the format was 50 percent cartoons, 50 percent prose features. By the end of the nineteenth century full page strips had replaced the cartoons but, as a rule, the prose half remained a feature of most British comics until the 1950s, when it began to be trimmed down, and finally vanished as recently as the 1970s. If comics definitively consist of pictorial narratives, then where does well over half of the British industry's output fit in?

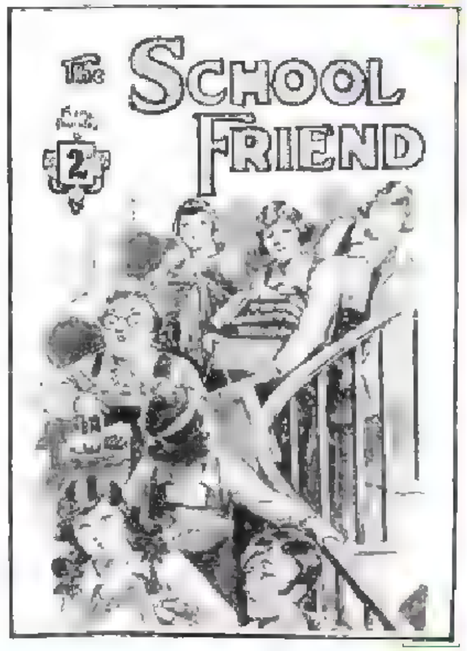
But apart from those British comics generally listed in price guides, until the 1960s there was also another kind of juvenile weekly consisting *entirely* of illustrated prose. These are generally referred to as "story papers", to distinguish them from the pictorial comics. The first and longest lasting of the breed was the **Boys' Own Paper**, (1879-1967) followed by the **Girl's Own Paper** (1880-1956). Both were launched by the Religious Tract Society as wholesome, Christian antidotes to the cheap, sensational fiction known as "penny dreadfuls". Both spawned many secular imitators. The **BOP** in particular introduced a new, light-hearted variety of stories set in boys' private schools, a theme which was to become enormously successful in the hands of writer Frank Richards, whose stories of Billy Bunter and many other school heroes or anti-heroes made bestsellers of Harmsworth's story papers **The Magnet** (1908-1940), **The Gem** (1907-1939). But were these papers comics? In two important respects I'd argue that they were, despite their complete lack of picture stories.

For several years now, whenever I've talked with someone who read comics in Britain before the Second World War I've asked them if they can remember what titles they liked. Almost invariably they can – childhood memories remain strong – and *always* the list that is reeled off with a smile consists of both pictorial comics and prose story papers, mixed together without distinction. While it would be too much to claim that such casual polling on my part could produce conclusive proof, it does seems that to readers in Britain during the first half of the 20th century, a "comic" was a cheap, entertaining children's weekly – picture stories or no picture stories. To those readers, the word "comic" refers to a publishing format.

Secondly, the pre-WW2 "story papers" were the breeding ground for all the stories of adventure, action, schoolboys (and girls!) and sport which erupted into the pictorial comics during the 1950s, providing young readers with an alternative to the then frowned upon US action/adventure comicbooks. Before the war the pictorial comics had been genuinely comic, focussing on caricatured slapstick humour and leaving the more hardboiled action material to the prose papers. The cancellations and cutbacks of the 1940s resulted in a melding of those two narrative styles in the British picture comic of the 1950s-1970s, with many titles, ranging from **The Hotspur** to **The School Friend**, changing from "story paper" to "picture comic".

But that "change" may be substantive only because modern definitions of comics place the emphasis on the primacy of pictorial narrative. A definition which centres around format, though, would seem to make a case for the existence of popular, *bona fide* comics without pictures – and it offers a mode of analysis which may get around the "pictorial content" definition's tendency to regard the medium as one monolithic global form, to open up further analysis of local variations. If nothing else, it's an idea which widens the scope of research into the medium's history yet further!

BL



THE SIMON FURMAN INTERVIEW

TRANSFORMED

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

IN 1984, a race of warrior robots crash-landed on the planet Earth and promptly set about invading popular culture. Their influence surreptitiously continues to the present day. One of the men responsible for aiding the alien conquest was British writer Simon Furman. As rumours spread of a second major invasion, again with Furman's involvement, Borderline's Kelvin Green interrogated the alien collaborator via email.

BORDERLINE: First of all, please tell us about yourself.

Simon Furman: I've been in the business, one way or another, for about 20 years now. My first comics-related job was for the UK magazines company IPC, then publishers of titles such as 2000AD, Roy of the Rovers and Eagle. I was assistant editor on Scream, a junior horror anthology title. It's also where I cut my scriptwriting teeth, on strips such as *The Dracula Files* and *Library of Death*. Steve Dillon drew my first ever script, a werewolf story, and made it look passable. From there, in 1985, I moved to Marvel (UK) as assistant editor on Captain Britain Monthly. Sheila Cranna, the editor of Transformers (the UK version), offered me script work on the title (and so, with issue #13 and part one of a story called *The Enemy Within*, it began). After that I worked on more Transformers stories than I can easily count, Doctor Who, Thundercats, Action Force, Dragon's Claws and Death's Head (all for Marvel UK). Then I was approached by writer Bob Budiansky, who asked if I wanted to take over from him on the US Transformers comic. I did, naturally, and my subsequent run on the book extended from issue #56 through to #80, and the whole of Transformers: Generation #2. Other work for Marvel US included Robocop, She-Hulk, Alpha Flight, What If? and Brute Force. I've also worked for Acclaim and Wildstorm, but most recently I've moved into TV animation, on shows such as *X-Men: Evolution*, *Beast Wars* and the yet-to-be screened *Dan Dare*.

BL: One of your current projects is a web-comic called The Engine. Tell us about that.

SF: The Engine: Industrial Strength is a concept I co-created with Transformers artist Andrew Wildman. We'd been looking to do something together for a few years, but the state of the industry meant that our best efforts (and there were a few!) went nowhere. We also wanted to do something that was ours, that we owned. You can only do so much where you sign your life away and don't share in any success, and still maintain your cutting edge. Finally, we hit on the idea of going for broke and publishing on the web, establishing the concept (and the copyright) and then selling it on (into other media) later. So far there are two instalments (with a third on the way) and an illustrated text story live on the site, and we've had pretty good stats (with over 2,000 regular visitors per month). We're currently developing other series/concepts under our company name, Wildfur (www.wildfur.net), the long term idea being to build up a catalogue of potential licenses. It's early days yet, but all the

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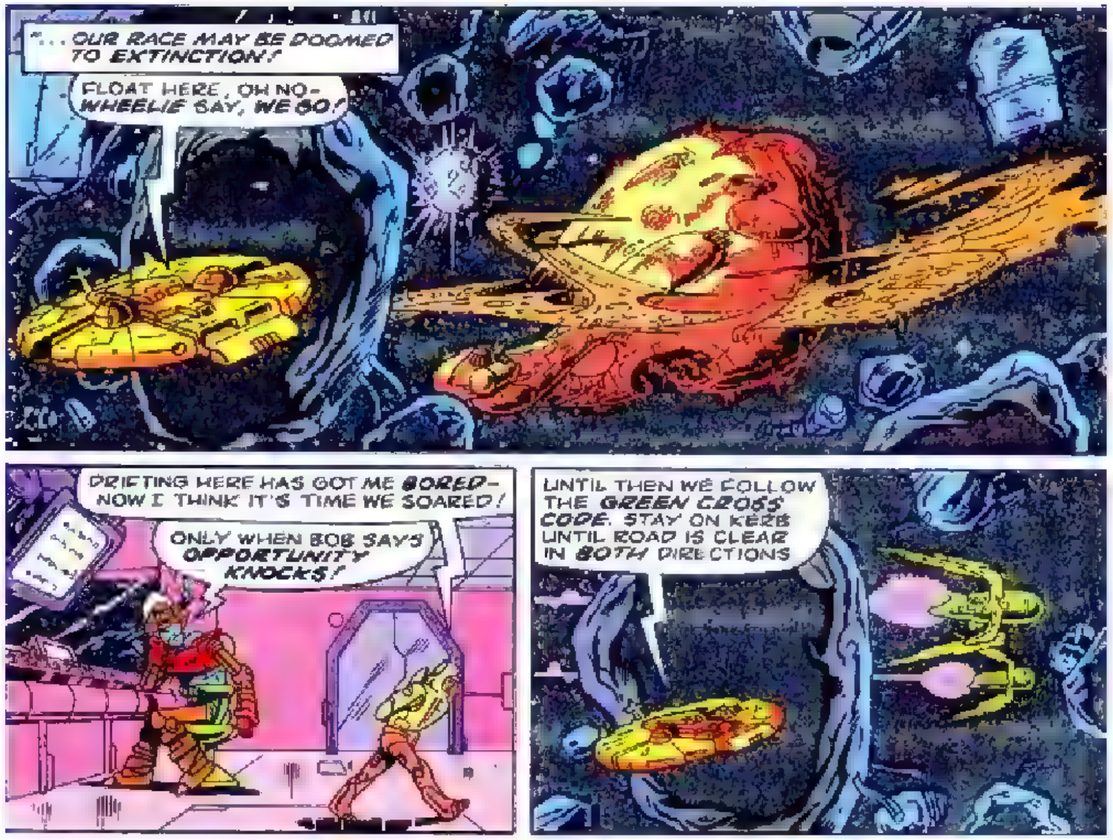

"...OUR RACE MAY BE DOOMED TO EXTINCTION!"
FLOAT HERE, OH NO- WHEELIE SAY, WE GO!
DRIFTING HERE HAS GOT ME BORED- NOW I THINK IT'S TIME WE SOARED!
ONLY WHEN BOB SAYS OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS!
UNTIL THEN WE FOLLOW THE GREEN CROSS CODE. STAY ON KERB UNTIL ROAD IS CLEAR IN BOTH DIRECTIONS

signs are good for 2002 and beyond.

BL: It isn't a straight comic, just on the web. It has sound effects, and the odd animated bit. Is it really a "comic" at all? Why did you choose to do it in this way?
SF: We (Andrew and I) had looked at other "web comics" and decided that there was far more potential to this kind of publishing than simply displaying flat artwork on a computer screen. For a start, standard comic page artwork wasn't the right shape for a monitor, you were forever having to scroll down. Download times were also an issue. We felt that whatever we did, in terms of presentation, had to be tailored to the specific audience we were aiming at. It had to have depth and flow and a dash of SFX or animation. So no, it's not a comic as such, but it does employ comics traditions and values, only with a new spin. It's been a steep learning curve, but with the application of Flash, 3D modelling and other cool packages that Andrew understands and I don't, we're starting to get into our stride. The feedback we've had from our viewers has been good (and they've been hugely patient with us), and we're very fired up about the whole concept. We've also been helped immensely by web designer Adam Jennings, who really brought the whole thing together in a very dynamic and cohesive style.

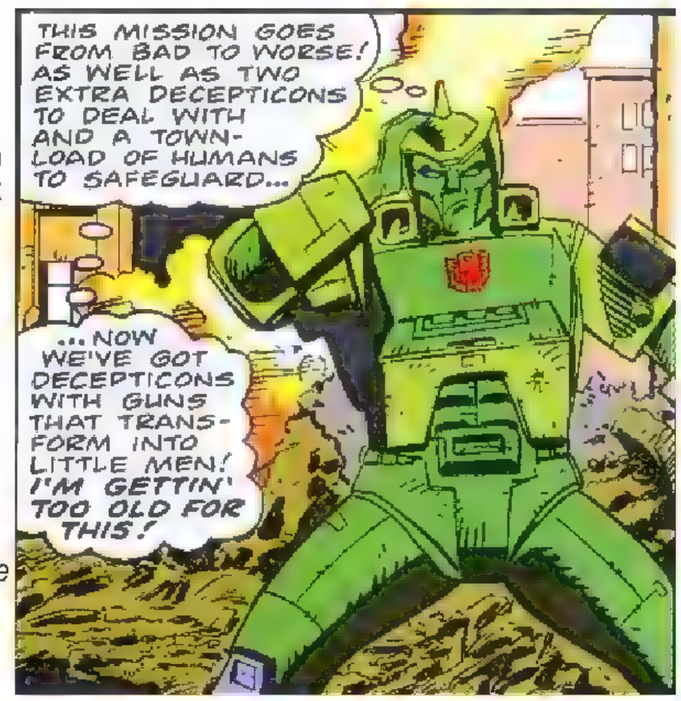
BL: On a related note, what does the internet hold for the future of comics?
SF: There's lots of interesting stuff happening on the web right now, and we seem to be riding a wave of new projects and better graphics. I don't think for a moment that the web will ever replace printed comics, it's simply another medium to explore. I definitely think the two can work hand in hand, without really cannibalising each other. The great thing about publishing on the web is that your set-up costs are so much less than taking a huge gamble on self-publishing (in print/paper terms). Online, you can test the water and judge if the project has the legs needed to make the jump into other media. It also gives you some breathing space to get it into the best possible shape before it gets out into the real world.

BL: What's it like working with your Transformers collaborator Andy Wildman again?
SF: In a word, great. Although we've known each other for years, and worked together on lots of Transformers stories, both UK and US, we'd never really had a chance to get our mutual teeth into a project of our own and show what we can do. From early on, I recognised in Andrew a great talent for conjuring up exciting visuals and memorable characters. He got so into the US run of Transformers, and was putting an immense amount of creative energy into every panel. It was that passion I really wanted to tap into, and finally (after a few noble stabs and heroic dead ends) it all came together in The Engine. Andrew works best when he's fired up by a concept, and from the word go he was throwing me all sorts of curves, artistic and otherwise, that really kept me on my creative toes. It's been a blast, and it's really only just started.

> *"...I don't think for a moment that the web will replace printed comics."*

BL: The Engine, in some ways, reads like the toy licences you're justifiably famous for. I can definitely see a range of Engine toys in my mind's eye. Is this a deliberate move on your part?
SF: Absolutely, and I make no bones about it. There was a certain degree of practicality and an eye on other potential outlets when we created The Engine, and that holds true for the projects we have in development. Though our aim is always first and foremost to produce dynamic storytelling and exciting characters, we do see The Engine as having a life after the web, in a variety of different forms.

BL: Transformers are back in the public consciousness. Dreamwave is resurrecting the comic, Titan is releasing the original US series in trade paperbacks, there was the BBC show, new toy lines, etc. Why do you think this is? Is it a case of 80s nostalgia, or is there more to it than that?
SF: Even I've been surprised (pleasantly) by the level of response to the "return" of Transformers. To a certain extent, this is due to propitious timing, and the whole resurgence is riding this wave of 80s nostalgia that seems to be everywhere right now. But we tend to think of Transformers as having gone away and come back, and that's not the case. The fans that were fans back in the 80s have, to a large extent, stayed fans, either overtly or subconsciously. And while it certainly has gone sky-high


THIS MISSION GOES FROM BAD TO WORSE! AS WELL AS TWO EXTRA DECEPTICONS TO DEAL WITH AND A TOWN-LOAD OF HUMANS TO SAFEGUARD...
...NOW WE'VE GOT DECEPTICONS WITH GUNS THAT TRANS-FORM INTO LITTLE MEN! I'M GETTIN' TOO OLD FOR THIS!

recently, there haven't been many periods where there hasn't been a presence (Gen 2, *Beast Wars*, *Beast Machines*, *Robots in Disguise* and so on). The Transformers conventions have likewise rolled on, gathering a momentum of their own. There's a joke I heard about *Doctor Who* fans that works equally, if not so starkly, for Transformers fans: "How many *Doctor Who* fans does it take to change a light bulb?" "None, they just sit around waiting for it to come back on."

BL: Richard Starkings said in an interview that your run on Transformers was one of the all time greatest runs on any comic. I would imagine he's not alone in that opinion. How do you feel about that kind of appraisal of your work?

SF: I feel I may owe Richard several beers next time I see him. It's certainly nice of him to say that, and good to hear. And though I don't see it quite as one of the all time greatest, it is my favourite body of my own work. When I look back, it's hard to find stuff that's (almost) completely wince-free, but my original run on Transformers (US), certainly in the latter stages, still holds up (and trust me, I'm my worst critic). A lot of that is due to Andrew, it has to be said. I had that peace of mind that comes from knowing the artist you're working with, and knowing that they understand where you're coming from. It takes all the pressure away and you can go wild.

BL: Fifteen or so years later, how do you view that classic Transformers run?

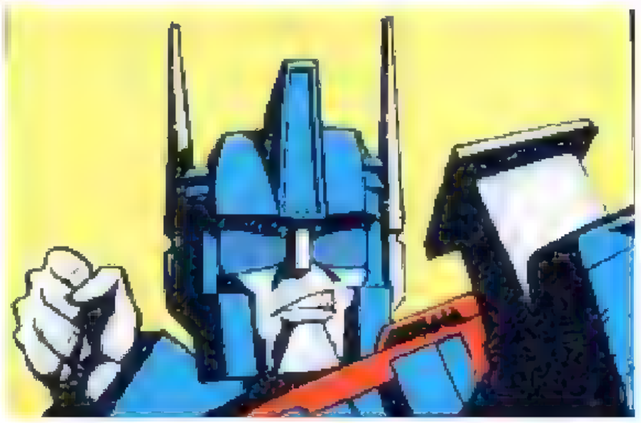
SF: If we're talking UK, then I see those stories with a huge amount of nostalgia. I was feeling my way back then, growing in confidence as a writer, and there was a naive liberation in the feeling that you were breaking new ground. Of course, that wasn't the case. All I was doing was taking the comics traditions that had fed me as a kid and re-tooling them, but I like to feel that if I was emulating, I was emulating the best. I grew up on Stan Lee, Gerry Conway, Roy Thomas, Marv Wolfman, Archie Goodwin, and I loved the sheer scale and sweep that they used. I loved Lee's dialogue, recognising it is as overblown, but loving it all the same. And I saw a good fit with what I wanted to do on Transformers. Lots of character stuff, but always, always with this epic, dramatic, larger-than-life backdrop. And really, I applied all the same principles to my US run. I just felt confident enough by then to really up the ante.

> *"...it's hard to find stuff that's completely wince free..."*

BL: What went into the stories back then? What were your influences? I remember, for instance, quite a heavy private eye/film noir influence in a couple of stories, and there was the Aliens *- inspired chapter of* Matrix Quest.

SF: A question I'm often asked is, what non-comics fiction do I read, and I'm sure people expect the answer will be sci-fi or fantasy. But in truth, I've never much settled into that genre at all. I've tried, but overall I'm far happier with a good crime novel. The hard-boiled private eye, pulp-fiction has always been my favourite: Raymond Chandler (particularly), Dashiell Hammett, Robert B. Parker, Robert Crais, then authors like Elmore Leonard, Carl Hiaasen, Campbell Armstrong, Ed McBain, James Ellroy. So yes, I couldn't help dropping in some pulp elements. The character of Nightbeat, a detective, was a godsend, and I aped Hammett in *Matrix Quest* and Chandler in *The Big Shutdown* (UK comic). But I'm also a big movie buff, and *Alien/Aliens* are big favourites.

BL: You were writing Transformers for the UK editions of the comic before you became the writer on the US version. How did you go from

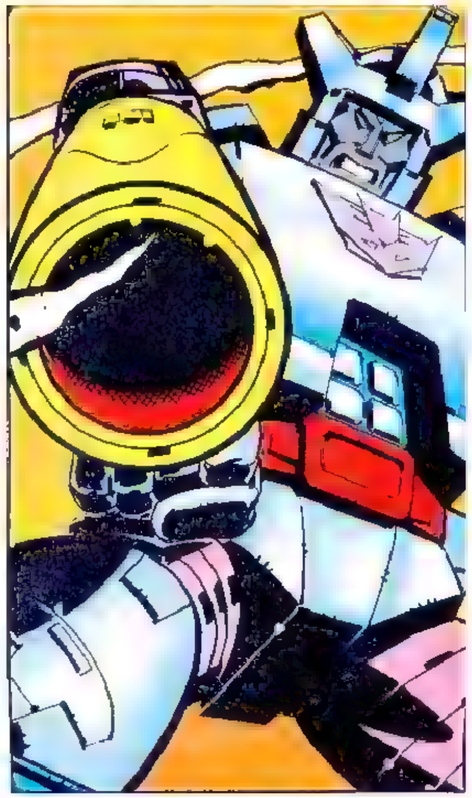


put forward UK artists such as Geoff and Andrew, and again Don and (particularly) Rob trusted my judgement.

BL: In all honesty, what are your views on the US run before you took over?
SF: The plain truth is, I think Bob did an incredible job on Transformers under difficult conditions. By the time I took over, Hasbro (the toy company) were more concerned elsewhere, and weren't looking at the book in the same way. It became far less of a priority for them, and there were fewer and fewer characters being introduced. Bob had always been at the front line, obliged to throw in a host of new characters in practically every issue. There are some great story arcs, some less so, but above all else Bob is a hugely professional writer/editor and knew his stuff. He practically wrote the Transformers Universe. It's perhaps fair to say that by the end of his run, Bob's focus had also moved elsewhere, but when he was on song, it was inspirational stuff. I should know, I had to spin off from his stories in the UK comic.

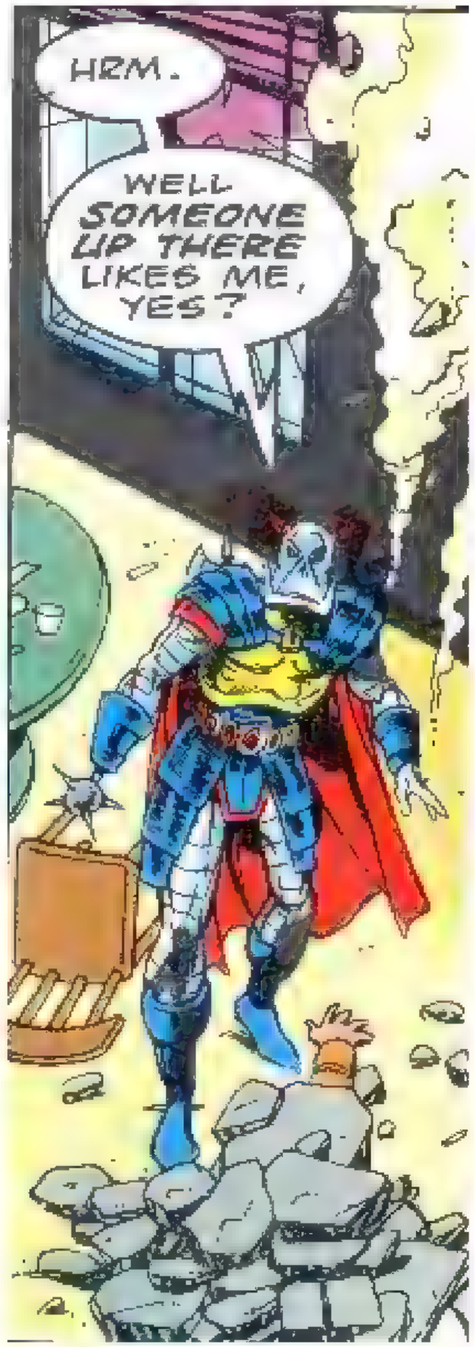
BL: I think it's fair to say that one of the reasons why your Transformers stories are so fondly remembered is that you made those characters your own. Based on that, how do you feel about the Dreamwave Productions revamp? Is there a sense of trepidation about seeing "your" characters return, or is it just nice to see them back?
SF: Just nice to see them back. Full stop. I don't really see them as my characters. The characters were there before I ever got ahold of them, and I claim no patronage now. There are indeed some I feel I made my own, but that was then and this is now. What I'm really hoping for with the Dreamwave material is a fresh start. I don't really want to write a continuation of the storylines I did for the Marvel Comic, and I likewise wouldn't want any other writer to be bound by them. My strongest feeling is that whatever Dreamwave does, be it coming from me, Chris Sarracini, or whomever, it should have its own voice, and rise or fall on its own merits.

> *"...I could finally make it one cohesive [Transformers] universe..."*



BL: Is there anything you can tell us about your rumoured involvement in the new Dreamwave Transformers comic?
SF: I can tell you that I'm going to be writing a six issue limited series, and that it goes right back to the very start of the war between the Autobots and the Decepticons. My intention, though the details are still not set in stone, is not to re-tell established stories, but to craft an all new tale, one which underpins and (hopefully) explains the long conflict to come. It'll be classic characters, it'll be set on Cybertron, and through Optimus Prime and Megatron it will get right to the heart of what drives the Autobots and Decepticons. The series will kick off towards the end of the year, probably after Chris's Gen 1 mini concludes, and my aim is to totally blow people away.

BL: Besides The Engine and Transformers, what projects have you got coming up?
SF: I'm going to be doing a non-Transformers comic series for Dreamwave, based on a concept developed by Pat Lee. It's way, way too early to give details, but the concept artwork Pat did was drop dead gorgeous. It's sci-fi, big, sweeping and dark, dark, dark. I have a whole new world to play with, and I can't wait to get started. I'm also developing a TV series with a UK-based company, one that combines CG animation with live action. This has been ongoing for some months now, and we're still not even at a stage where



anything can be announced, but I've found (even more so than with comics) that these things take time. Beyond that, more animated work, more Wildfur projects and maybe even more comics.

BL: In terms of comics, and putting aside the above, is there any particular title or character you'd really like to write, or story you're itching to tell? Simon Furman's X-Men, perhaps?
SF: The thought of doing the X-Men (comics-wise), even if it were a possibility, doesn't really appeal. I'd rather be doing something new, or something that at least isn't bound in quite so much labyrinthine continuity. I'd also like my comics work to be reasonably contained, miniseries or something with a definite beginning, middle and end. Unless you go for the somewhat tired option of reinventing the wheel, I'm not sure where there is to go with something like the X-Men. And besides, the guys that are doing it right now are doing a blinding job.

BL: How does working in comics differ from the various types of non-comics work? How do conditions, pay, methods, etc. compare?
SF: When I made the transition to TV animation, I was surprised at how alike the two disciplines were. The difference is with the pacing. In comics, you can afford to have a page or two of talking heads, allow the action to slow right down, but in animation (where the episodes are a tight 22 minutes long) everything has to be done on the run. And the dialogue in animation has to be very sharp, after all, people have actually got to say the lines. You read your average comic out loud, and you realise how stilted a lot of it sounds. And as much control as you generally don't have over comics work (unless it's creator-owned), you have even less over the end product in animation. With *X-Men - Evolution*, you had script editors, producers and about three different levels of approval at the likes of Marvel, Warners and so on. What you see on the screen is often very different to what gets sent off. But the big, big plus of working for TV animation is the rates of pay. I won't get specific, but when I got my first paycheque from *Beast Wars*, I thought: "Wow! Why didn't I do this sooner?"

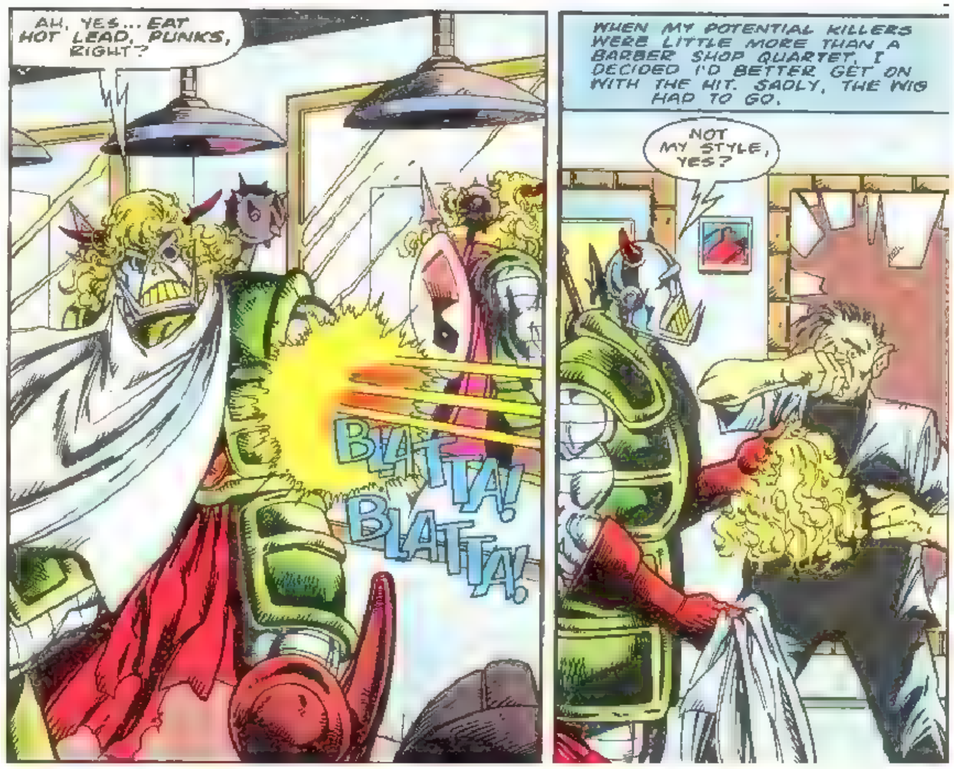
BL: Do you have a favourite area of work? Do you see yourself as a TV scripter above all, for instance?
SF: I don't really see myself as one thing or another. Last year, I wrote a non-fiction book to accompany the Channel 4 series *Extinct* (aimed at younger readers). It was different, it was a lot of work, but I'm always glad to break out into new areas. Overall, I'd like to be doing more of my own things, stuff that's tailored for Wildfur specifically. Beyond that, I'm just a writer.

BL: Why do you write? Is it characters that demand to be written or plots that need to be told, or is it just the act of writing itself? Or is it something else entirely?
SF: It's just what I do. What I've always done. When I left school, I didn't have a clue what I wanted to do or be. It wasn't as if I'd done lots of amateur writing beforehand, or even been particularly so inclined at school. I had a vague idea I wanted to be a journalist, and that if I had a strength it was the English language and a fertile imagination. Nowadays, though, it's what drives me and inspires me. I love writing, I love telling stories, and I particularly like to hear that people have enjoyed what I've done.

> *"...Filmic references have been a part of comics for a long time."*

BL: Do you find it easy to write?
SF: I suppose so. You always feel you're tempting providence to say so, but I've never (or rarely) had a total and utter blank. Often, if any idea won't present itself, I'll just sit at the computer (very rarely do I plan or make notes) and type - random ideas, story titles, broad ideas, scenes. Eventually something will click.

BL: You've done plenty of work outside comics, and there seems to


AH, YES... EAT HOT LEAD, PUNKS, RIGHT?
BLATTA! BLATTA!
WHEN MY POTENTIAL KILLERS WERE LITTLE MORE THAN A BARBER SHOP QUARTET, I DECIDED I'D BETTER GET ON WITH THE HIT. SADLY, THE WIG HAD TO GO.
NOT MY STYLE, YES?

be a fad of late to get non-comics writers (and artists) into comics creation. Are the boundaries between "disciplines" breaking down? In your experience, is it really that easy to switch?
SF: I don't think the boundaries were ever that far apart. Filmic references have been a part of comics for a long time; films have always looked at comics for ideas, TV animation sits somewhere between the two. In the end, it's telling a story. The story and the characters are really the thing. You can assemble the best artists, the best directors, the best whatever, but if the core idea and the script aren't there, the whole thing will flounder. If anything's changed, it's that the audience is more discerning, more critical; the punters who buy the comics or the cinema tickets have real power. Half-baked or vaguely good just doesn't cut it any more.

BL: We've talked about what influenced those classic Transformers stories, but what influences you now? Are there particular writers, TV shows, etc that get those creative juices going?

SF: I really try not to be too influenced by what I see or read elsewhere. It's hard, you come across a very cool idea and you want to play with it yourself. But again, these days you'll get caught out every time. Often, you have to give whatever you've written an extra read through, in case what you've done, however subconsciously, is really just something else.

BL: Aside from influences, are there any TV shows, books, bands, films, etc. that you particularly enjoy?
SF: I am currently enjoying *Enterprise*, the new Star Trek (refreshingly straightforward, especially after the techno-babble overload of *Voyager*), I'm a big fan of *Buffy* and *Angel*, both really good examples of great writing and well developed characters, and then there's *The Office* (apologies to non-UK readers), a really superb half-hour comedy show. My guilty pleasure at the moment is *Footballer's Wives*, a UK drama that's wonderfully trashy, but at the same time well written. Films-wise, I don't seem to get to the cinema anywhere as much as I'd like to. Good films I haven't seen recently include *Amelie*, *The Devil's Backbone* and *Lord of the Rings*. I'm looking forward to *Ocean's 11*. Bookwise, I've just finished Michael Crichton's Timeline and Ed McBain's Candyland (which he co-wrote with Evan Hunter, who is actually him!).

BL: A strange question to ask, perhaps, but are you reading any comics at the moment? If so, what are you enjoying?
SF: Right now, the comics I give more than a passing glance to are J. Michael Straczynski's Amazing Spider-Man (he seems to have captured the essence of the character effortlessly), Powers, and (when it ever comes out) Planetary, which I rate highly.

BL: Finally, Ultra Magnus: tragic hero or pathetic failure?
SF: Oh, the former, definitely. He just had to get soundly beaten before he triumphed. Always.

BL: Thanks very much. Is there any last thing you'd just like to say in passing?
SF: Only to thank all the fans, Transformers and otherwise, who've given me so much good (and occasionally bad, but you need that too) feedback over the years. And if you want to know what I'm up to, often before others do, check out the news page on the Wildfur site or the Engine site. BL

Mr. A.
by Ditko
FOOLS WILL TELL YOU THAT IT'S INHUMAN TO LIVE BY BLACK AND WHITE PRINCIPLES BUT HUMAN TO ACCEPT AND PRACTISE GREY PRINCIPLES. TO BE CORRUPT TO COMPROMISE WITH EVIL!
THERE IS NO MIDDLE OF THE ROAD BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL! THEY ARE NOT TWO ROADS GOING IN THE SAME DIRECTION BUT OPPOSITE ROADS TO DIFFERENT GOALS!
YOUR CHOICE OF ACTIONS WILL DETERMINE IN WHICH DIRECTION YOU WILL LEAD YOURSELF
TO CLAIM TO BELIEVE IN THE GOOD AND TO WILLINGLY COMMIT EVIL IS TO TRY TO WALK A LINE BETWEEN THEM! TO REJECT THE GOOD BUT TO FEAR BEING CALLED EVIL IS TO ADMIT THAT YOU DO NOT CONSIDER
GOOD
EVIL
YOURSELF FIT TO GAIN ANYTHING EXCEPT BY DISHONEST
CHOOSE YOUR ROAD - NO ONE CAN DO IT FOR YOU!
COPYRIGHT © STEVE DITKO 1967

AISA, THERE IS NO GREY – COMING TO TERMS WITH STEVE DITKO

Pete Ashton looks at an artistic legend...

COMICS fans can be divided in many ways but one definite divide falls between those who worship Jack Kirby and those who haven't really read much of his stuff. A few years back I found myself drinking regularly with hardcore Kirby fans, which is rather like drinking with hardcore bikers - they speak a language that sounds like English but on reflection makes no sense to anyone other than them. They also lack the defensiveness of other specialised comics fans. They don't say it, but they emit an aura that says they've studied the good stuff, they know the contents of the mother lode. You don't get that with fans of the Legion of Superheroes.

One recurring topic of conversation was about Steve Ditko and a character called Mr A. On mentioning Mr A the group would sit back en masse, heads would be shaken, deep breaths were taken through gritted teeth, beers supped and cigarettes lit. Ditko's Mr A comics were apparently rather frightening to behold. They took the notions of the hero and of justice to the logical extreme and took no prisoners. It was harsh stuff. Since Ditko was the guy who created Spider-Man and The Hulk and is forever associated with Stan Lee's 60s Marvel scene with its social relevance, pop-art frivolity and healthy dollops of teen angst, I found this hard to take on board.

Recently I came across the Fantagraphics Ditko collections from 1985, which are packed full of Mr A. Truly, these are the most frightening comics you're likely to read. Wonderfully executed by a master of the art, but written with such a passion and profound righteousness that, if you're a good woolly liberal, it almost hurts to read them, until you start admiring his point of view. You think Rorschach in Watchmen was a rightwing fascist bastard? You ain't seen nothing 'til you've read Mr A.

Let's look at a sample strip. *Right to Kill* was created in 1973 and starts with a short essay which opens: "Any man who claims the right to another's effort or life automatically renounces the concept of rights and their protection of his right to his own legitimate efforts and life." In other words, if you do bad to someone, you have no rights if someone does bad to you. After 15 paragraphs of this, the story begins. Lilly, a young girl, is brutally kidnapped by masked thugs who demand a ransom from her parents. The money comes through and two of the gang decide to kill Lilly anyway. The third is unsure but doesn't want to release the girl on his own in case he gets caught. The others talk him into killing the girl, in a wonderfully stylistic sequence of panels. The recurring motif in Mr A is two squares, one white, one black, forming a rectangle with no grey area in the middle. Good is white and evil is black. To ram home the point, the two baddies are shown standing in the black square while the unsure guy stands in the white with his back to them. He wants to be good but "it takes too much time and effort" to get wealth and security. They offer him a shortcut and talk him back over to the dark side. "One bad thing" he said to himself, "then for the rest of my life, I can, I will be good... Just let me, this one time, get away with Evil!"

Just as he's about to kill Lilly there's a knock at the door. In the doorway is Mr A's card, one side white, the other side black. a caption reads "White and black is Mr A's symbol of justice: of non-contradictory identification; good is good and evil is evil and neither can be both at the same time. Each is the antithesis of the other! So, if good is to survive, no compromise with evil is possible!" Mr A bursts in, dressed in white with an expressionless white steel mask. One of the thugs takes him on, another tries to escape with the money, chased by the waverer who, after all this, wants his share of the loot.

Mr A dispatches the first crook and heads after the other two who, like all good criminals, are fighting amongst themselves. With one of them down, the waverer is off with the cash, but the other shoots him in the back. Mr A confiscates the gun and goes to release Lilly. As they walk off into the white square they leave the mortally wounded bad guys hanging off the end of the crumbling black square. Lilly asks Mr A "They're calling! Will you help them?" A replies, "No!" "Why won't you?" "I won't help anyone who believes he has a right to hurt you." "Don't you care what happens to bad people?" "No! I only care what happens to the innocent and the good people."

We end with Mr A standing steadfast on the boundary of good and evil facing towards Lilly who is running into her parents' arms. Behind him the black square has completely dissolved and the evildoers are falling away pleading

for the mercy which Mr A will not give them. Surrounding Lilly are the words Reason, Honesty, Justice, Rights, Truth, Good, Rationality, Mutual Consent, Retaliatory Force, Principles. The evil side has Irrationality, Corruption, Deceit, Injustice, Force, Crime, Misery, Compromise and Dishonesty.

Steve Ditko lays it on thick and doesn't let up. All the strips are like this, and all are filled with overflowing dialogue ramming home the same points again and again. Good is good and evil is evil and there is *no* grey area. If you do bad you *will* be punished. This is Batman taken to the logical extreme and without the emotional fuckups. This is the pure essence of a superhero, where the power is not the ability to fly or to punch really hard but pure, unadulterated good. And where good and evil are concerned, good can do anything it wants in order to win.

It's easy to dismiss Mr A as the ramblings of an insane right-wing genius, or to simply brush over this period and concentrate on the easy stuff, as many Ditko aficionados seem to do. But there's something more pertinent here, something Alan Moore picked up on when he based Rorschach on Dikto's paranoid world-view and discovered, to his discomfort, that readers saw Rorschach as the hero of the piece.

THEY SAID IT WAS TO BE SURE EASY SAFE. NO ONE GETS HURT.
IT TAKES TOO MUCH TIME AND EFFORT TO GET AHEAD AND NO GUARANTEES! I WANT WEALTH SUCCESS. SECURITY NOW. SOMEHOW!
WE GOT AN EASY WAY! A SHORT CUT!
KIDNAPPING! NO!. IT'S A CRIME WRONG R.SKY..
USE YOUR HEAD! WE WOULDN'T DO IT IF OUR PLAN WASN'T FLAWLESS!
BEING HONEST MEANS ACCEPTING HANDICAPS! WISE UP! YOU CAN'T BE DECENT AND ALSO BE A SUCCESS! ITS ALWAYS BEEN... TAKE OR BE TAKEN!
YAH! TRY TO BE GOOD AND YOU GET NOWHERE! I REALLY TRIED!
THIS ONE TIME. STOP BEING HONEST AND STUPID! ONE JOB. A SURE THING.. YOUR CUT TAX FREE..25 GRAND! GUYS KILL FOR LESS!
ONE BAD THING THEN FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE I CAN. I WILL BE GOOD... I SWEAR TO GOD JUST LET ME TH S ONE TIME GET AWAY WITH EVIL!
NO ONE WILL GET HURT! THE GUY'S LOADED! AND YOU DON'T THINK HE GOT SO RICH BY BEING HONEST!
YAH! SO IT'S NOT LIKE WE'RE ROBBING THE INNOCENT! THE THIEF'S GOT IT COMING TO HIM. IT'S JUSTICE!
JUST THIS ONE TIME. I'LL BE LIKE EVERYONE ELSE..BUT THEN..I'M GOING TO BE HONEST..DECENT..GOOD!

Maybe this is the problem superhero comics have - the refusal to accept that the basic premise of a hero is, taken to its logical end, a battle between good and evil where no quarter is given. Without this extremism superheroes become shallow and laughable. Steve Ditko was instrumental in defining what we know today as a superhero. Mr A is what he intended them to be like.

Are you scared yet?

BL

The King of German Comics

IN summer 1999 I was in Düsseldorf airport with half an hour to kill before boarding my flight home to England; so I popped into the airport bookshop for a few minutes to see what comics they had to offer. The selection was exactly the kind of predictable, mainstream stock I'd expect to find in such a location: Disney and **Sailor Moon** magazines on the shelves, and a spinner rack stuffed with **Asterix** translations and albums by Ralf König.

König is one of the biggest names in contemporary German comics. Born in 1960, he trained as a carpenter before studying at the State Academy for Art in Düsseldorf, where, as he puts it on his website, he tried to take oil painting seriously while busy scribbling comics about men with big noses. His first collection was published in 1981, and in the next few years he turned out many strips for magazines before publishing two full length books in 1987: his adaptation / reconstruction of Aristophanes' comedy **Lysistrata**, and **Der Bewegte Mann (Maybe... Maybe Not)**, both put out by the prominent Hamburg book publisher Rowohlt. **Der Bewegte Mann** was a hit, translated into French, Spanish and various Scandinavian languages and made into an enormously successful movie in 1994. Since then he's published many more books through Rowohlt and albums through Carlsen, scripted a film adaptation of his **Der Condom des Grauens (The Killer Condom)** which he describes as a disaster, and is currently working on a third film, **Wie die Karnickel (Like Rabbits)**, scheduled for release in 2002.

So it was no surprise to see a stack of his albums in that airport shop; they can be found in any bookshop and newsagents in Germany. But as an Englishman I couldn't suppress a wry smile. König's huge mainstream success in his home country - the film of *Der Bewegte Mann* outsold everything at the German box offices in 1996 except *The Lion King* and *Forrest Gump* – and his lack of success in the English language market (only three of his books have been published in English, and *Maybe... Maybe Not*, the US film release of *Der Bewegte Mann*, vanished without trace) indicate a somewhat embarrassing cultural divide. You see, König's subject matter is domestic sex comedy - often with explicit depiction of sex – generally played out between socially mismatched couples... and those couples are always gay men.

To an Anglophone mindset, that would automatically make his work minority fare – no-one but gays would want to read comics about gays, right? This is where that cultural divide yawns wide. German society is as prone to homophobia as any other Western society; in his wryly humorous way König often addresses in his work such topics as German legal restriction of gay rights, homophobic beatings and the stigma attached to AIDS. The country does not have a large enough homosexual community to account for *Der Bewegte Mann's* success, both at the box office and at the 1995 German Film Awards, where it scooped up three of the four main prizes. So König's work is clearly popular with a largely hetero audience. Why? Because while it features gay male characters and gay sex, it's really about relationships. Sexuality is sometimes the subject matter, but as often it's the setting; comics about soccer players are likely to depict soccer games, comics about people in relationships are likely to feature sex. Except, of course, that in the Anglophone world they don't. Comics there are still thought of as juvenile material, so the simple fact that lovers tend to make love has to be obscured by a sudden change of scene, or flat out ignored... or labeled as "pornography". In effect, König is dealing with an everyday kind of realism which, in Anglophone comics, is also a taboo. Most of his work has been translate into French, Spanish, Dutch, Swedish and Danish; but it's too much for the Anglophone market to handle, it seems.

Quite apart from the matter of what this implies about relative cultural values, it's a major shame because König's comics are clever and very funny. Recently I've been reading some of the short strips which constitute his major ongoing series of the 1990s, **Konrad und Paul**. The protagonists are his usual socially "odd couple" - Konrad is an intellectual music teacher involved in his first gay relationship, Paul is a young and randy working class man, a habitué of the gay clubs and social scenes – and the cultural distance between them is a springboard for humour and social satire. But it's their petty misunderstandings, spats and reconciliations which drive the strips, and keep it in territory familiar to anyone who has ever been involved in a relationship.

As an example, in the one page strip *O-Töne* an interviewer from the Köln gay radio station arrives at the couple's flat to interview Konrad on the subject of gays and marriage. Paul answers the door, mutters "It's for you", glowers and disappears into the kitchen. From then on the attempted interview is constantly interrupted by a shouted argument between Paul in the kitchen and Konrad in the living room - P.:"You forgot to buy Nutella!" K.:"It's in the fridge!" P.:"I've told you not to put it

DAS IST KEIN NUTELLA! DAS IST SCHOKONÜSSE! "! WIESO KAUFST DU IMMER WIEDER DIESE BILLIGSCHEISSE?!
WO IST DER UNTERSCHIED?!!
NUR NUTELLA IST NUTELLA! DAS PREDIGE ICH DIR SCHON SEIT ZEHN JAHREN!!!

there, it goes as hard as a rock!" P.:"This isn't Nutella, it's Chocky Nuts! Why d'you always buy this cheap crap!?" K.:"What difference does it make?!?" P.:"Only Nutella tastes like Nutella, I've been telling you that for 10 years!!!" In the final panel the interviewer tries again - "Gays and marriage?" "No way!", shouts Paul. Konrad comments that if he married *this* man he'd throw himself off a bridge… to which Paul yells "So would I get your hi-fi system?". The whole dispute is beautifully staged: the subject is, of course, Paul's jealousy, but König keeps Paul himself out of the picture, forcing the reader to watch Konrad's growing annoyance and the interviewer's hopeless embarrassment… as, all the while, his questions are, in a manner, answered. The comic theme of a jealous lover disrupting conversation with an argument over a tired and trivial domestic issue is venerable – and that the lovers are men is functionally irrelevant.

This is not to say that König doesn't deal with gay issues. In *Was Bleibt*, for instance, he shows Paul moving silently around a flat, watching and listening as his friend tells him who should have each of his special possessions now that he's going into hospital. As in *O-Töne* the subject is never mentioned, just very clearly implied; the reader is left to see and to realize that Paul's friend is in the later stages of AIDS. The narrative focusses on depicting a man disposing of his good and chattels with dignity and humour, and perhaps with a refusal to break down under the circumstances; at the end Paul sobs, a tear appears in his eye, his friend puts his arm around him and says "If you feel that bad about it, you get the pumps, not Horst." "Can't you just *shut up* for one minute?!?", sobs Paul. It's a dignified and touching moment warmed with humour. But there's also a lot of earthiness in König's work. In *Familienplichten*, seven silent panels in which Paul walks into a public toilet and engages in a penis-comparing showdown with three guys is interrupted when Konrad walks in and fills the panels with words, calmly telling Paul to pack it away and come back home, because he knows perfectly well Konrad's mother is coming over for a birthday meal, and anyway why would anyone would want to hang around a place like this, oh, and don't forget to wash your hands… It's a combination of a "mother-in-law" gag and the contrast of a wife breaking up a display of machismo by the lads; again traditional humour is recast, but this time in a more explicit setting.

König puts his material across with a drawing technique which is loose, deceptively casual and decidedly mainstream - perhaps another reason why his work is so widely popular is that visually it belongs to the same school as that of Claire Bretécher and Jules Feiffer. It differs from the work of those artists in being sometimes more literary in tone. As is perhaps demonstrated by the examples described, the primary themes of his strips are often "hidden" behind visual settings which are generally either domestic or characteristic of the gay scene, and behind streams of naturalistic dialogue. The reader intuits and recognizes what is taking place by interpreting the context. It is also both more static and more "comic-like"; König rarely makes much use of body language depiction, preferring instead to concentrate on caricatures of facial expression and on use of iconic techniques like short, shaky lines to indicate trembling, cross-hatching to represent blushing and, above all, hugely expressive eyes. His people really look nothing like people at all – yet their appearance conveys easily read signs which combine with their voluble dialogue to put across considerable depth of meaning even in one page strips.

For the purposes of this brief introductory piece I've concentrated on aspects of a single series published by a comics publisher. König's longer works would require more space and more complex discussion. Yet they are really the core of his output. That they are published by a mainstream paperback publisher is not just a matter of format - like Simmonds' **Gemma Bovery** or Ware's **Jimmy Corrigan** they are genuine graphic novels, not trade collections of comics. **Der Bewegte Mann** deals in considerable depth with a working class hetero's discovery of his bisexuality, taking in along the way detailed evocations of gay society and sharp analysis of gender biases; **Lysistrate** deals with much the same subject matter while cunningly reworking Aristophanes' satire on the tension between domesticity and machismo into a play setting within which the reader is positioned as self-conscious audience member, a spectator who remains distanced from the story's events. König may justly be described as one of Germany's finest novelists; that his novels are told in pictures seems to make little difference to most European audiences.

But whether those who only read English will ever be able to sample more than three of them remains to be seen. For all the easy accessibility and mainstream qualities of König's work, how would the English language market classify it - as mainstream comic strip gay porn?? It may be that a sweeping revolution in Anglophone attitudes towards sex and sexuality would be required before it was possible to accommodate one of Germany's finest cartoonists.

Maybe… Maybe Not (Der Bewegte Mann) *can be ordered direct from the Fantagraphics website* - www.fantagraphics.com/cart/ *, type Ralf Konig into the search engine.* ***The Killer Condom (Der Condom des Grauens)*** *and* ***Lemon Cake (Zitronenröllchen)*** *were published by Catalan Communications in 1991 but are currently out of print. Ralf König's website can be viewed in English at* http://www.ralf-koenig.de/en/index.html *, but you should probably be over 18 years of age!*

Mike Kidson

BL

WAR JA KLAR, DASS DU DICH WIEDER HIER RUMTREIBST! UND ICH SITZE ZUHAUSE UND WARTE!
VIELLEICHT DARF ICH DICH DARAN ERINNERN, DASS MEINE MUTTER HEUTE GEBURTSTAG HAT UND WIR SIE GEMEINSAM BESUCHEN WOLLTEN?!
?!
ALSO LOS, PACK DEINEN DÖBEL WIEDER EIN UND KOMM MIT, WIR SIND SPÄT DRAN! SIE WARTET SICHER SCHON!

Dean Haspiel is possibly best known for his contributions to such titles as Harvey Pekar's American Splendor, Bob Fingerman's Minimum Wage, Negative Burn and the annual Expo anthologies. Over the course of his career, Haspiel has gone from art assistant for comics luminaries such as Bill Sienkiewicz (while he was working on Elektra: Assassin), Howard Chaykin, and Walt Simonson's lauded Thor run, to an original voice in the bear-pit that is the semi-autobiographical comics genre.

Borderline's Jay Eales spoke with him about his many current projects.

THE DEAN HASPIEL INTERVIEW

THINGS

Borderline: Opposable Thumbs is the umbrella title for your semi-autobiographical comic strips. How autobiographical are you being with these tales?

Dean Haspiel: The stories I tell under the Opposable Thumbs umbrella are semi-autobiographical, which means that they are as candid and verbatim as my memory can muster. Of course, the more distance I have between the event and retelling the event, the more hindsight I am able to color the tale with. The story I told in 9-11 Emergency Relief (which will reappear in OT2) is the rawest story I have ever told because I had to turn that piece around within weeks of the tragedies.

BL: What are the rewards and the pitfalls of working in the autobiographical genre?

DH: Besides exposing your life to criticism and moral judgement, semi-auto-bio comix often involve people and situations that don't necessarily want to be exposed, nor has permission been formally granted. Then again, I maintain my right to tell my life as I understand it to unfold, and most lives involve family, friends, neighbors, enemies, communities, heck - the world. So, there is a bold risk factor in creating the verisimilitude of reality while entertaining. A venture that often yields a little trouble.

BL: Were you pleased with sales of the first issue?

DH: Alternative Comics broke even with sales of the first issue of Opposable Thumbs, which isn't great, but allows for us to pursue the venture and see where it goes. Autobiographical comix is a tough genre to sell when you're not famous and/or not telling the story of someone inherently important to the world. I'm sure autobiography is a tough sell in any format and market.

BL: Will you be reprinting all your older strips, such as my personal favourite, Lionel's Lament, or will Opposable Thumbs just contain a selection of older material alongside new work? I suppose that strips like Lionel's Lament would be better suited to a separate book, with other non-Billy Dogma or autobio stuff. Any such plans in the works?

DH: Funny you should mention Lionel's Lament, *[above]* because last July, cartoonist (Keyhole co-creator/Titans of Finance artist) Josh Neufeld and I decided to kick start an exquisite corpse with the

Lionel character. We turned around two panels each a week at a steady clip for about two months and then took a break for his wedding and honeymoon. Shortly thereafter, 9/11 occurred. We never got back to the experiment and that is something I plan to continue and finish someday soon. It's a good experiment to employ and invigorates exploring the comix form.
Opposable Thumbs will stay as my umbrella title for semi-auto-bio comix, and The Billy Dogma Experience will always tell tales of the last romantic anti-hero. I occasionally write & draw fiction that doesn't fit into my two staples of personal comix, and I hope to publish a collection of those short pieces someday.

BL: What can you tell us about the contents of issue 2?
DH: Opposable Thumbs #2 is due to debut at SPX 2002 in September.

In this new issue, I confront the horror of a 100-dead cats and a psychotic neighbor in Awful George, deal with heartbreak in Ice Man, and emasculation, fear, and the repercussions of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 91101, Doored, and Closet Shut-In.

BABY, I DON'T SEE HOW YA CAN BALANCE THE YING AND YANG OF YER GIVE AND TAKE--
--AND PERSUADE YERSELF THAT COMING BACK HOME TO A CONSOLATION PRIZE LIKE ME --
MAKES THE WORK DAY ALL WORTH IT
YOU TOLD ME ONCE THAT MONEY CAN'T MAKE YOU HAPPY, IT CAN ONLY AFFORD HAPPINESS.
IT MADE ME THINK ABOUT MY RAPTURE AND THE SACRIFICES I MAKE TO GET THERE
BE HAPPY--
--AND I'LL AFFORD THOSE SILLY BILLS
AFTER THAT?
VOLCANO GIRL
KING KONG COULDN'T SWAT OUR SALVOS!
5

BL: You've said in the past that Billy Dogma, the protagonist of a lot of your other strips, is also modelled to a degree on you, but obviously amped up to the Nth degree. He's appeared in a few different places and forms, hasn't he? Can you talk us through them, and on to future plans for the character?
DH: I originally created Billy Dogma as a voice for my feelings and knee-jerk philosophies, coupled with concerns for romance, loyalty, and love. As the character developed and stuck his proverbial neck out, I learned more about myself and how I function in society. Billy Dogma acts as a virtual mirror for who I currently am and who I purport to be. In some cases, Billy Dogma is more auto-biographical than Opposable Thumbs, and is a radar for my life. To catch up on the Billy Dogma experience, you can pick up: Daydream Lullabies and Boy in My Pocket, both from Top Shelf. I am currently working on a picture novella called The Devil's Muumuu, which is due sometime in 2003, and then I hope to tackle the next Billy Dogma collection, tentatively titled Aim to Dazzle.

BL: September 11th has affected people the world over, of course, but how has it affected you, as a New Yorker, right in the middle of events on that day, and since?
DH: The 9/11 attacks burst my little American bubble and granted me an invitation to embrace the world as it truly functions. Territory and power is the be all and end all battle among mankind and that only ever yields war. Watching those Twin Towers filled with innocent New Yorkers crumble to earth sobered me from dreaming of a better tomorrow. If anything, the 9/11 attacks allowed me to mobilize my own personal resolve and gave me the charge to translate my desires into something tangible rather than a figment of daydreams.

BL: Your piece in Alternative Comics' 9-11 Emergency Relief book, 91101, describes the haunting image of burning documents floating through your kitchen window after the towers fell. Do you think it's cathartic, being able to express your feelings about the tragedy and aftermath in a creative medium?
DH: When Alternative Comics' publisher, Jeff Mason, first asked me to take my feelings about what I had witnessed and turn it into a piece of art, I agreed to do it. I found that it was nearly impossible to write and draw something that was so big and new and abstract. I couldn't find a voice and so I tried to answer the initial question of that day, "where were you when..." and that is how I tackled the event. I didn't feel anything cathartic until I started receiving emails from people I didn't know thanking me for putting my feelings and common account into a medium that they could touch and hold onto, so that they, like me,

JANE'S BONUS FELL THROUGH AND I WAS "LET GO" FROM MY PART-TIME GIG. TWO WEEKS AND COUNTING.
JANE, DON'T PEEK!
I DESPERATELY WANTED THE LATEST OTUS FROM MY FAVORITE CROONER AND JANE WAS EYEBALLING A SLINKY RED OUTFIT AT THE THRIFT SHOP FROM AROUND THE WAY.
OH, BILLY. I CAN'T STAND IT ANY-MORE!
RECYCLED GLASS AND TIN JUST DIDN'T ADD UP TO MUCH. I WAS A NICKEL SHORT AND A GRIFT SHY.
SHHHH. WE'RE ALMOST THERE
CAROLERS RUINED THE SURPRISE WITH THEIR BEST RENDITION OF "SILENT NIGHT," BUT IT SET THE MOOD RIGHT NICE, SO I SPARED 'EM THE EVIL EYE
OKAY. POP 'EM OPEN!
AWW, BUTTERCUP!!!
HAPPY HOLIDAYS, SUGAR SNAP!
WE WERE GOING TO HAVE OUR SLICE OF HOLIDAY AND EAT IT TOO, OR I WASN'T THE "ROMEO" I BOASTED TO BE.

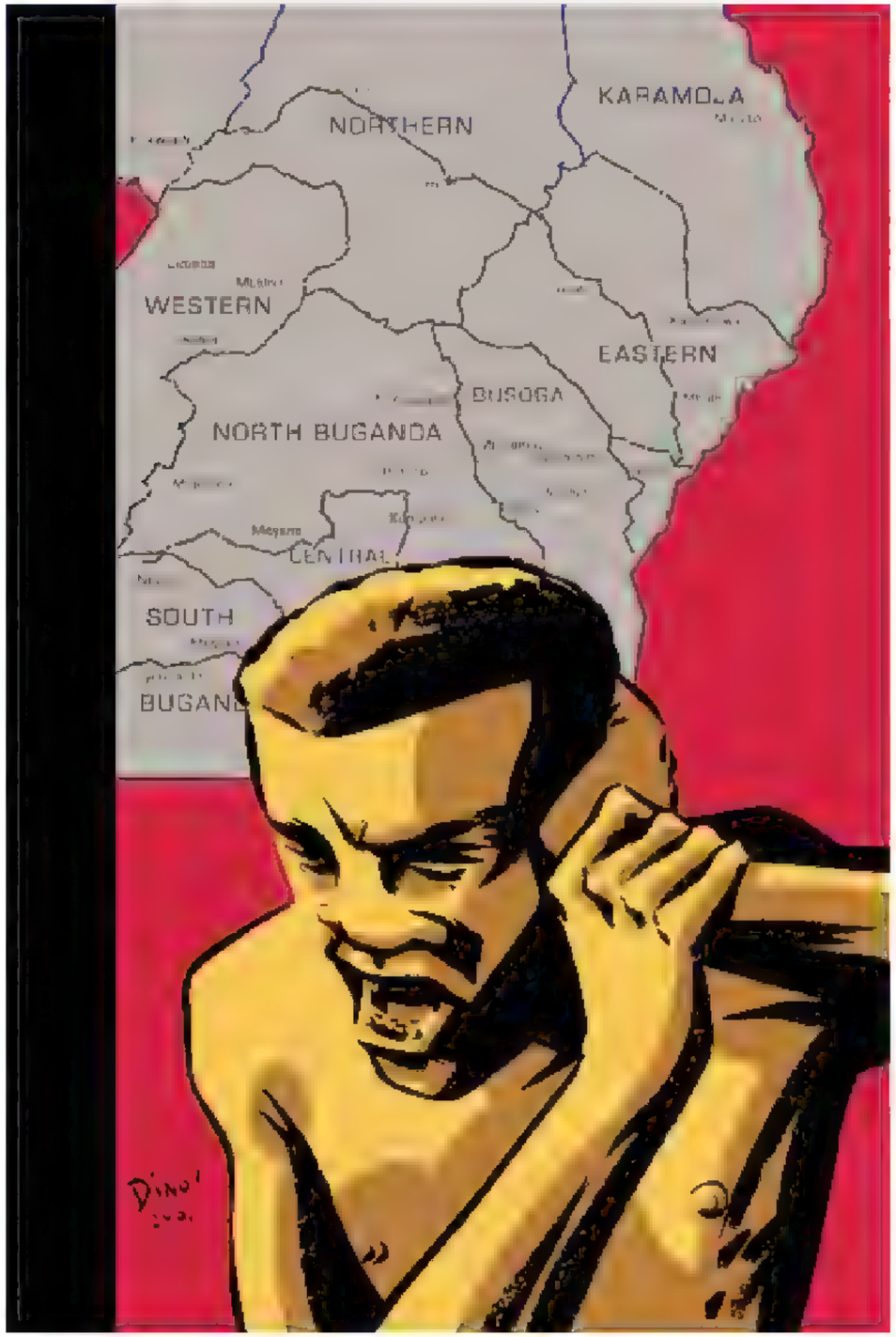
could allow one to let go and begin to shed the horror of that day in some small way. The expression allowed me the process to heal.

BL: With a few months' distance from September, do you see any lasting changes within the comics industry as a result of that day, or will it go back to business as usual?
DH: Going back to "business as usual" is probably the only way humans can cope with paramount tragedy. Sure, there is an emotional coma we all fall into, but the only way to win is to function. So, ultimately, the body reacts far quicker than the mind and, thankfully, sparks that fire that mollifies our soul.

BL: You've been lured back to the House of Ideas recently, to work on a number of Marvel titles. How are you finding the Marvel of today, compared to the days when you were art assistant to the likes of Chaykin, Simonson and Sienkiewicz?
DH: Marvel is so damn exciting these days. Shit, I'm reading X-men again. It seems that Quesada, Jemas, and the editors (like Lis, Alonso, and Powers) are throwing anything and everything at the wall to see what sticks. I imagine that this is what Stan Lee was doing back in 1961 when he was given free reign to do whatever he wanted to with a fledging comic book company and he corralled the best talent (Kirby, Ditko, Wood, Roth, Romita, Heck, et al.) to flip the script on the superhero genre and bring something new to the table. Marvel is stretching out its rubber band, snagging talents from all genres and ghettos and allowing the company to flex new muscles with old horses.

BL: Tell us about the Marvel projects you're involved with.
DH: I'm just finishing up drawing Muties #3, written by Karl Bollers and colored by Matt Madden, due to be released April 3rd. Next, I tackle a short Captain America story written by Bollers that will be included in a Cap mini-series called Red, White & Blue, due later this year. Then, I am going to draw a 4-issue Thing mini-series written by Evan Dorkin called "Night Falls on Yancy Street," that is not scheduled yet, but I hope the first issue sees release by Christmas.

BL: That just about covers the short-term, but do you have any long-term plans that you can talk about?
DH: I always have irons in the fire. Suffice to say, I'm excited to be working for Marvel, and I hope to do more work for DC (I'd love to draw OMAC and Plastic Man) and possibly Vertigo. Also, I plan to keep a firm foot in the indie/alt arena with my creator-owned properties. Also, everybody should be reading Colleen Coover's Small Favors (published by Eros), the best comic being produced today. BL



For further information on Dean Haspiel, check out the following URLs: http://www.DeanHaspiel.com http://www.indyworld.com/altcomics http://www.topshelfcomix.com An extensive interview covering his entire career can be found on the Grayhaven Magazine website, http://www.grayhavenmagazine.com/interviews/dean_haspiel.htm

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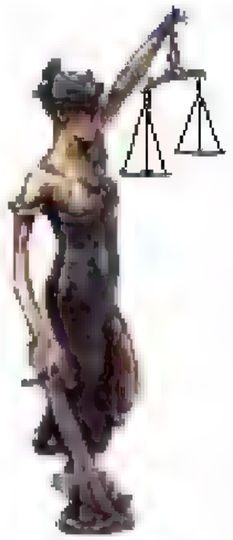

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A Lot of Love

Slave Labor Graphics
By Geoff Watson & John Gebbia

Jack Peoples used to be a fat kid, but now he's a District Attorney with a fitness instructor girlfriend and a life most people would die for. But the one thing he doesn't have is what, deep down inside, he really wants: Jack desperately needs the love of obese women, as many as he can manage, and he will go to any lengths to achieve this dream.

This 111-page comic veers from sympathy to satire, comedy to farce, and all without losing its authorial tone, which hovers constantly outside the events quite impassively. It's an impressive achievement, which holds the story together when, by rights, it should fall under its own ambition.

Gebbia - currently drawing Gloom Cookie for the same publisher - imbues the cast with emotion and realism while still exaggerating for effect with occasional caricaturing, bringing some of the excesses of the script under control whilst giving others free rein. It's a seamless collaboration and a solid read for the money, although I fail to see how a major independent publisher can credit two editors on a book that doesn't appear to have been proofread.

The Verdict: An engaging and ambitious story, well told and with a range of emotions you'd need to read half-a-dozen other comics to match. (AC)

Amazing Spider-Man #38

Marvel
By J. Michael Straczynski and John Romita Jr.

Interesting to compare Amazing with the other white-hot Spidey book of the moment... while Bendis's Ultimate goes for fast-food Spidey (great while you're reading, but can you remember it ten minutes later?), JMS is giving us something a lot more meaty to chew on. The long-awaited confrontation between Peter and his Aunt May covers all the bases you'd expect (and perhaps goes a little too far towards the saccharine in places), but also offers some intriguing clues as to where they can go now. The idea of May's own guilt mirroring Peter's is a nice touch, as is her "I'm stronger than you think!" reaction. Best of all though is May's vow to do something about her nephew's public image - J. Jonah better watch out!

The Verdict: A 22-page sit-down chat between a boy and his Aunt? That's my kind of superhero comic! (RH)

Banzai! #1-4

Carlsen Germany
By various writers and artists

I'll freely admit to being somewhat resistant to manga. I've tried various samples via America, from Mai The Psychic Girl through a sampling of Lone Wolf and Cub, various issues of Manga Mania and a couple of the Viz-translated Rumiko Takahashi series, all the way back to Frederick Schodt's admirable study Manga! Manga! and his abridgement/ translation of The Rose of Versailles. But most of those efforts have felt like just that - effort,

earnest labour rather than enjoyment.

So I was surprised when Banzai! turned out to be highly enjoyable right from the start. I checked out the first issue as a matter of curiosity and was immediately impressed by how much Carlsen seem to have got the formula right: 300 pages per squarebound issue, a good mix of action/adventure, romantic comedy, SF and horror series, pages reading from right to left as the originals do, high quality white paper and, to cap it all, a cover price which is seriously affordable (currently about the equivalent of 5 US dollars per issue). But the real advantage is that each series is given 50 to 60 pages per issue - a good solid chunk which, unlike the standard US comic-sized Viz issues or even the Tokyopop anthologies, allows you to read these stories at the pace their creators intended. And I find that that makes a real difference.

It's hard to pick a first choice amongst the stories being serialised - my favourites at the moment are probably Masashi Kishimoto's ninja/ SF Naruto and Masakazu Katsura's romantic, mildly sexy DNA2 - because what I'm really enjoying is the chance to get to grips comfortably with the visual language of manga as it's meant to be seen. As much as the narratives, it's the sheer *energy* of these comics (enhanced by a very bright, flashy packaging style) that's blowing me away, in particular the extremely emotional nature of the iconographic techniques. After a decade during which the manga influence on English language comics has steadily increased, it's hardly penetrating to observe that manga presents a very different, much less staid, comics vocabulary - but for once, in Banzai!, I've found a format and presentation which really seems to show that vocabulary off.

The drawback for Anglophone readers may be that it's all in German. Oh well. I can only hope that American manga publishers are paying attention to this series, though – it has a lot of tips to offer on how to do translated manga the *right* way.

The Verdict: Flashy, exuberant, cheap and yet of very high quality, this is an attractive package in which Carlsen shows manga formatting to best advantage. (MK)

Captain America: Dead Men Running #1

Marvel
By Darko Macan & Daniel Zezelj

According to Marvel, this is a story to bridge the gap between the previous Captain America series and the

imminent Marvel Knights revamp by John Ney Rieber and John Cassaday. The first indication of the maturity with which the character will hopefully be treated is that the cover of this is fantastically off the wall, being wildly sketched and half-painted by Derek Hess. Secondly, this creative team - fresh from Vertigo's most recent Sandman Presents series - has already increased the believability of the character with just this first issue.

Inside, Macan tells his now-trademark "casualties of war" story, landing Cap in South America to aid in the evacuation of U.S. soldiers on the run from drug runners. But the soldiers have child refugees with them, together with some secrets that could compromise their mission, as well as the morals of Captain America himself.

Zezelj's art is still a treat, making up in sheer beauty what he sometimes lacks in storytelling, though his tendency to jump ahead in time between panels is still an irritation. The chunky and solid feel to his art works particularly well with the superhero, somewhat easing his transition from Vertigo to Marvel.
The Verdict: This is an interesting take, pitting modern-day soldiers with current attitudes and methods against the epitome of the patriotic super-soldier; showing that Cap is still someone they can idolise while also being an unreachable ideal. (AC)

Cla$$war #1
Com.X
By Rob Williams & Trevor Hairsine

There is only so much that can be done with the superhero, to the extent that any new venture, however worthy, can only serve as a retread of what has gone before, Cla$$war, then, mixes the attitude of The Authority with the righteousness of Rising Stars in a tale wherein some of the superheroes of America decide to make the world a better place by taking on their own masters. The reader is launched firmly into the fray as The American and his group of disparate heroes put into action a plan to depose the corrupt U.S. government against opposition from covert agents and other superheroes. Despite this, the background is well laid out and the characterisation is neatly filled in as the action progresses, in an impressively dense and organised style; I've rarely seen a comic launch with such a heads down, balls to the wall fashion as this.

Williams adds real world politics and anti-globalism into the tale, producing a comic that rings true and heroes that you automatically side with, even as they commandeer the American airwaves and assault the President on the White House lawn. Hairsine's art is frenetic and solid, based in reality and coloured accordingly. A couple of the figures are a little indistinguishable from one another, and the pace is a little breakneck, but when it's as much fun as this you'll want to read it twice and the second time's the charm.
The Verdict: If you ever wished that The Authority could be serious for a moment or that Rising Stars could somehow say more in fewer words, then this is for you. (AC)

Dark Knight Strikes Again #2
DC
By Frank Miller and Lynn Varley

I have never in my whole life been more convinced of the intrinsic worthlessness of anything. There is no writing here; this is just incoherent ranting, peppered with macho bullshit dialogue and flip one-liners that would shame Schwarzenegger. There is no plot to speak of, merely badly thought out and badly executed set pieces that together form nothing that so much as resembles a story. Miller's disinterest in Superman has turned into hatred, using the DC icon as a punching bag on which to vent his frustration; and his much-vaunted return to tell one more Batman story is all over the place, featuring Batman hardly at all, yet managing to shoehorn in many other second stringers that we'd all forgotten about.

The art is appalling; looking like hastily scrawled inks over pencilling that may as well be (and probably is) nonexistent. Lynn Varley's colouring is a travesty, most of it having little relation to the art she is supposedly colouring; the least we could expect is that she stays within the lines, but even that seems too much to ask. It is garish and unsubtle, not only failing to add anything to the artwork but making it even more unspeakably ugly, if such is possible.

But it doesn't matter. DC, Frank and Lynn have been paid. Pity the poor retailer. They will be the ones to take the fall for every copy of this that fails to sell due to consumers dropping the title after the first issue, and at US$7.95 an issue it's not something most comic shops can afford to have sitting on the shelves.
The Verdict: Remember this fiasco next time the new Sin City comes around. Readers, vote with your money; retailers, vote with your orders (AC)

Elektra #7
Marvel Knights
By Greg Rucka and Chuck Austen

Rucka steps neatly and seamlessly

into the writing duties on this title, offering a very detailed run down of how exactly a woman bent on vengeance could go about contacting an assassin such as Elektra Natchios, and how covert authorities could monitor such activity. It's an interesting and thoughtful approach with a deliberately slow pace, although this is enlivened by Rucka's habit of dropping little pieces of information into the telling of the story, such as the woman hiring Elektra thinking her name to be an omen, which readers of Greek mythology can muse over in order to second guess the story.
The Verdict: As well written as it ever was, perhaps even a little improved. It's drawn by Chuck Austen. (AC)

Establishment #6
Wildstorm
By Ian Edginton and Charlie Adlard

After an interesting debut the creative team of Edginton and Adlard continue to show that they are prepared for their "difficult second arc".

The Establishment, the UK's premier covert superteam goes public - just in time to be upstaged by the return of a certain pilot of the future. And where he goes little green men are never far behind, although this time the green men in question are somewhat smaller than everyone expected...

Like other recently launched Wildstorm offering, The Monarchy, The Establishment has yet to really find its feet. However, whereas The Monarchy had nothing to sustain the audience's interest in the meantime, The Establishment at

least serves as a treasure trove of cleverly melded British pop-culture references. This issue's allusions include *Yes, Minister*'s Jim Hacker, Dan Dare, Richard and Judy, and even a guest appearance by the Rover's Return public house! And that's aside from the team members themselves, who run the gamut from *Dr. Who* to *The Avengers*, with *Danger Man* and even *Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)* thrown in for no extra charge.

The Verdict: An enjoyable if not yet unmissable read that promises to continue improving over time. One to watch. (RC)

The Flash #182
DC
By Geoff Johns and Scott Kolins

For a year or so now this has been one of the best-looking superhero books on the market, with the new art style of Scott Kolins more than equalling those snazzy Brian Bolland covers. There has been a tendency for Geoff Johns to underwrite though - nice for the artist, but offering the reader little depth and waaay too quick a read... even for *this* character! That seems to be changing though, with this issue an excellent stand-alone character piece featuring Captain Cold (Johns's best move - his revival of the Rogues Gallery), re-establishing him as one cold-hearted SOB. OK, it slips into cliché occasionally - comics writers should be forbidden from using that hoary old "abused childhood" motivation forever, unless they can come up with a new spin on it.

The Verdict: In a rather bland era for DC heroes, the Flash is starting to race ahead again. (RH)

Four Women #5
DC
By Sam Kieth

This powerful, and often harrowing, tale draws to a conclusion with neither a bang nor a whimper but something else entirely, something not easily described.

The issue itself sees the four women of the title reflecting on the consequences of, and their reactions to, the events of that road trip to the wedding that they never quite made it to. But more importantly it also shows what each woman decided to do with her life afterwards...

While it will not be to everyone's tastes, Kieth's artwork, replete with cartoony expressions, packs more expression into the characters' posture, gesture and expression than that of most of his contemporaries. What might, in the hands of a lesser comic creator, have been a boring array of head shots as Donna talks to her councillor in fact narrate everything you need to know about her emotional state as she slowly claws her way to catharsis. The counsellor herself resembles the Julie Winters character from Keith's old comic, The Maxx - a nice "Easter egg" for long-time Kieth fans. This comic may not be perfect, and some of the symbolism might not be as subtle as it could be, but Kieth's ear for naturalistic dialogue and well observed characters enables him to just about carry it off with all the emotional impact that the series deserves.

The Verdict: A fitting end to an affecting tale. This will make a must read graphic novel when collected. (RC)

Hedg #2
Papyrus
By Patrick Sherman

There's so much that is quite dreadful about this comic, but on the other hand there's so much that is innovative. However, most of the innovation is probably lost by the time it becomes a comic book. Confused by that previous statement? Read on.

Hedg the hype and Hedg the comic are two separate entities. If Patrick Sherman wanted to do something more innovative than having no idea how to do comics and yet turning out a stunning looking bit of work, then he should consider trying something different with Hedg's subsequent release. The press pack (the 'first fully rendered, all-digital comic-book franchise') is almost jaw-droppingly impressive. It's obvious that Sherman wants his comic to succeed because he's pulling out all the stops to impress the press. The thing is, compare the pre-release versions of Hedg #1 and #2 to the actual comic of Hedg #1 and you realise that as adventurous as Sherman is trying to be, he just didn't take it to the limit.

Preview copies of Hedg are produced in a ring-binder with heavy stock paper (they are actually good quality colour photocopies) and rigid, clear plastic outer covers. It makes the preview something to want to keep - it also makes it even more different and if Sherman could have mass produced his comic in this slightly different form from the norm, then it might have had an extra hook to latch onto potential buyers.

But is it any good?

Actually, considering that Sherman freely admits he can't draw to save his life it isn't as bad as one might expect. He's obviously using a lot of CAD wizards to achieve the level of professionalism he's trying to achieve and the leap in quality between #1 and #2 is quite obvious. One expects him to be a CGI Michelangelo by the time he gets to a 6th issue (if indeed he hasn't starved to death by that time). But if the "art" is a bit too static at times, it's nowhere near as static as the script. It's trying to be a *noir*-ish thriller in a vividly vibrant future and while the plot seems intriguing, the characters just don't have that much in them. It's a bit like the *Final Fantasy* CGI motion picture - technically brilliant, but devoid of soul.

The scripting is the worst thing I can really say about it at the moment, though. Sherman has stated that he wants the plot to develop at the pace he envisaged for it and I, for one, am prepared to let the man run with the ball for a while. It doesn't appear to be going anywhere fast and has got where it is even faster, yet has the feeling of being really slow.

In fact Hedg is a bit like this review - it doesn't quite know what it's trying to say, but it's doing it using a lot of words and a little understanding.

The Verdict: Let's face it, comics readers hate CGI comics. There hasn't been a remotely successful attempt and sadly this hasn't really got anything more than any of its predecessors. But saying that, it has a lot of enthusiasm, it is different and compared to some of the superhero pap coming out from the major companies, this is almost worth your money. (DRB)

Marvel Mangaverse: Eternity Twilight #1
Marvel
By Ben Dunn

Ben Dunn returns to the Mangaverse to tie things up, for the time being at least. As the Hulk continues its destructive rampage, and the true consequences of the enemy attack on Stark Island become apparent, the heroes introduced in the various preceding one-shots make their stand.

Unfortunately, this comic is quite inferior in comparison with New

Dawn. Dunn is hampered by having to tie the Mangaverse one-shots into his plot, and he simply does not have the space to do it. This results in a needlessly rushed plot, and a number of glaring loose ends at the story's climax. Add to this a number of astoundingly illogical plot developments and we are left with a very confused story. All of this culminates in a truly bizarre ending which is either unexpected and audacious, or incomprehensible and corny.

On the other hand, Dunn's art is as attractive as ever, but Guru eFX's colouring is not as strong as it was in New Dawn. The vivid imagination Dunn expressed in New Dawn again produces some great ideas, although the breakneck pace of the rushed plot hinders their effectiveness and cripples their potential. Dunn's obvious knack for great (if shallow) characterisation is similarly hampered, although Tigra is again a highlight, and this comic sees the second (after The Ultimates) entertaining characterisation of Captain America this month. Here, he is presented as a slightly incompetent and slightly delusional leader.

This is a frustrating comic as the potential for excellence is obvious, and yet completely repressed by the scope of the whole Mangaverse project. It is still worth buying, as at least the story is wrapped up, although not in the best way.
The Verdict: Disappointing. Dunn is as good as before, but he is seriously crippled by having too much to do in too little space. (KG)

Muties #1
Marvel
By Karl Bollers and Salgood Sam, with Peter Ferguson

Buying a Marvel spin-off series – particularly one that is X-Men based – can be a fraught business, more so when, as here, you haven't heard of a single one of the creative team before. Well, I drive a Skoda and Danger is my middle name…

Jared is a 13-year-old boy who has jumped ahead three grades in school, which has effectively demolished his social and school life. In addition his father is a bum. This is a series focussing on those mutants in the Marvel Universe who do not don Spandex and fight to make the world a better place, let alone those who don less tasteful Spandex and fight anyone they don't much like the look of. Here we are offered stories about ordinary kids who are entirely and quite incidentally mutants.

Bollers' script is sharp and to the point; it needs to be, as each issue of this series will be self-contained. The layouts by Sam are fluent, including an interesting motif of illustrating some pages as if they were pencil sketches in a school notebook. Ferguson's paintings range from full colour painting in an old-fashioned Americana style to pages of chiaroscuro and sepia, with some four-colour dotting thrown in. Even given the resurgence of creativity at Marvel in recent years, this looks like nothing they've ever published before.
The Verdict: This is literate, unique, thought provoking and with varying art styles that enhance the effect of the story. If you were just reading this paragraph you wouldn't think I was talking about an X-Men miniseries, would you? (AC)

The Ochlocrat
Comics Conspiracy
By Doug Miers and Gerry Alanguilan

'Ochlocracy': if, like me, you've never come across the term before it's handily defined within the pages of this refreshingly original comic as "Government by the mob", in effect it represents the downside of democracy, where the dictates of individual conscience are overridden by the will of the majority. The Ochlocrat himself is reminiscent of the figure of the Harlequin in the classic science fiction story Repent Harlequin!, said the Ticktockman, but whereas Harlan Ellison's anti-hero was essentially an anarchist who championed individualism, Doug Miers's creation has just as much in common with his nemesis, the authoritarian Ticktockman.

In a world where interactive TV has become the ultimate measure of public opinion, and instant online votes supersede all the old forms of electoral representation, the mob itself has become king - in effect the viewing public are judge and jury while the Ochlocrat, with his live videofeed, acts as their executioner.

Doug Miers's script is action-packed, witty and thought-provoking, and though the Ochlocrat's first outing can be read as a self-contained story he really is a fascinating character that I hope to see more of in the future. Where Miers is clearly a gifted writer, however, the real revelation for me was the stunning artwork provided by Gerry Alanguilan - previously best known in America from his work as an inker at Marvel Comics. Honestly, I don't know if there is something in the air of the Philippines that encourages a suicidal work ethic but the only other artist I can remember who seemed able to match the amount of detail Gerry crams into this book was his fellow Filipino, the legendary Alfredo Alcala. Having said that, the amazing Mr. Alanguilan has succeeded in forging a powerful vision that is all his own, even as it combines eclectic influences from around the world: a bit of Moebius here, a touch of Otomo there, and perhaps even a suggestion of Barry Windsor-Smith in places. At times his linework is so detailed that the printed page barely seems able to do it justice, making this one of the few b&w comicbooks that would be significantly diminished by the addition of colour.
The Verdict: It's™The People's™Choice! (PR™)

Oddville!
Oni Press
By Jay Stephens

Oddville!'s a weird beast. It's a compilation of a comic strip that was originally serialised in a few alternative papers some years ago.

Its main draw, and the only consistent element between each strip, is a flying baby that gets in the way of various other citizens of the eponymous town.

Oni have taken it upon themselves to make the entire Jay Stephens library available, and Oddville! is as good a place as any to start. There's not much of an overarching plot, probably due to the constraints of weekly serialisation, but Stephens has a nice bold cartoony style, and his characters and dialogue are all just kooky enough to make you laugh without

being self consciously weird. Anyhow, if any of them do annoy, they're usually only around for a couple of strips before the baby flies off into somebody else's life.

Although it's predominantly a light-hearted comedy strip, Stephens isn't averse to tweaking the nose of genre conventions. Accordingly, there are appearances from his super-heroine, Jetcat, as well as a recurring role for a giant Ape called Gargantua Monkey.

It's not particularly groundbreaking and is possibly a tad insubstantial, but it's quite diverting, always amusing, can be read at a rattling pace, and serves as a good primer to Stephen's work.

Which all in all, isn't a bad recommendation.

The Verdict: Cute, kooky, charming fun. (SM)

Popbot #1
Idea and Design Works
By Ashley Wood and Sam Kieth

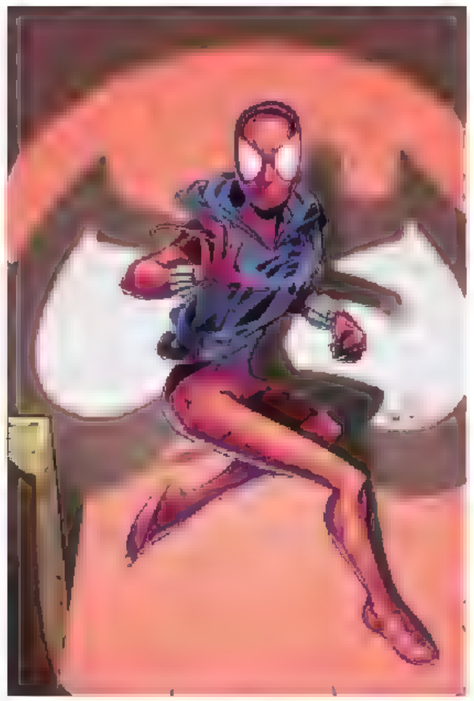
This one's a bit mental. There's this cat that's the lead singer of a far-future punk band, and he has a robot roadie called Popbot, whose previous owner needs tracking down. To this end, Kitty hires Sherlock Holmes (who has travelled to the future to escape Moriarty, only to find that he was Moriarty all along) to help in the search. Also, Kitty has a paternity suit with an underage groupie pending, plus the Devil has sent his son to catch the cat's soul. There's also a cloned Andy Warhol T.V. presenter, a blindfolded cowboy and some other really strange shit I'm not at all sure about.

It's by Ashley Wood, so it's all very pretty, full of exquisite black-and-white paintings of young groupies mostly, but the cat and the robot get a look in too, as do an Elvis ronin and some madman and his girlfriend in a shack and some other really strange shit I'm not at all sure about.

This isn't making much sense, is it? Well, there's a reason for that; this comic is free-form incoherence. Wood is credited with the story, and each issue is supposedly going to feature guest writers - although, as far as I can ascertain, that means Wood is just drawing things he likes to draw and leaving some other poor bugger to pick up the pieces and write some dialogue that will bring the whole thing together just in time for the credits. This month's poor bugger is Sam Kieth, and it is a testament to his writing skills that this thing comes off as well as it does. As long as Wood can attract decent writers to knock these pretty pictures into shape this might be worth looking into.

The Verdict: I really don't know. I think I liked it but it gave me a headache. It's a bit like beer. If you like beer, you might like this. Sorry I can't be of more help. (AC)

Spider-Girl #44
Marvel
By Tom DeFalco and Pat Olliffe



So Spider-Girl's had another reprieve... but will it really be able to pull in the readers it needs to stop the axe falling for good next year? Not unless Tom DeFalco makes a real effort to make this book more appealing to new readers! The plotlines and subplots are still too convoluted; with one of the largest supporting casts in comics, everyone scrabbles for their page or panel of the action. This is a fanboy's dream book - who else would care about this month's flashback dredging up memories of the *Scarlet Spider*? Certainly not newcomers! The title character has real charm, and the book could capture a *Buffy* or *Smallville*-style audience... but only if it stops paying so much attention to long-dead continuity - and starts having a little more fun with its nicely sketched premise and cast.

The Verdict: Time for a rethink – before the axe falls for real! (RH)

Stray Bullets #23
Capitan
By David Lapham

The welcome return of a title absent from our shelves for too long. Fortunately it is a return that shows Lapham has lost none of his skill with the single issue crime story whilst he was working on his tale of love gone wrong, Murder Me Dead. This issue sees us return to the autumn of 1980, when professional gangster Spanish Scott is teaching his nephew, who has learning difficulties, some lessons he will never forget as long as he lives...

The key strength of this title is not that each issue contains a complete story, nor even that all those stories fit together to form the big picture of a larger narrative - but that it regularly delivers to the reader believable tales of flawed people and random violence. The artwork and storytelling is as good as ever, lots of murky inks on the page mirroring the murky morality that pervades the lives of many of Lapham's characters. Each issue jets around wildly, with stories set between 1977 and 1997 (with the occasional story written by one of the characters, just to confuse you), affording a lot of fun for the reader in figuring out each of the characters' histories.

The Verdict: A superior crime comic that makes you realise just how empty and repetitive books like Frank Miller's Sin City really are. (RC)

The Ultimates #1
Marvel
By Mark Millar and Bryan Hitch

I do not like Captain America. My dislike for Steve Rogers's alter ego does not reach the levels of sheer hatred I have for Superman, but it has similar root causes. Admittedly, there is little actually wrong with the character himself, it is just that he is seriously deficient in the personality department. Lazy and/or inept writers have attempted to fill this void with patriotism. Unfortunately, patriotism alone does not a personality make, let alone patriotism that occasionally borders on fascism. So, up steps a non-American, Mark Millar, and against all expectations, gives Captain America a personality, albeit a completely deranged one.

Despite the cover, this comic does not feature the Ultimate version

of the Avengers team but rather forms a prologue, or part of one, to that team's formation. Captain America is most prominent on the cover, and this is his issue, detailing his last mission in 1945 and setting up his eventual return to active service. This is very much grounded in reality, with highly understated visuals and realistic dialogue and characterisation. Bryan Hitch's art, although as excellent as usual, is virtually unrecognisable in this setting, reminiscent indeed of Chris Weston's work. However, the style fits the setting perfectly and provides an effective contrast to the handful of panels of traditional Hitch superheroics.

Mark Millar writes an exciting war story here, easily the equal of a "straight" war comic, complete with a poignancy and horror that befits the realistic approach, as well as a healthy dose of humour and over the top action to remind the reader that although this is a gritty war story, there is a superhero at its centre.

As noted above, one of the main reasons for this issue's success is the characterisation of Captain America himself. It seems that having an outsider's viewpoint has allowed Millar to take a fresh approach to the character and add some much-needed depth to his personality. He is presented as being completely insane, mirroring the equally insane mission he leads but also the absurdity of the lone super soldier idea he personifies.

Depth comes from Captain America's realisation of his inherent falseness and absurdity, and his decision to keep up the act for the sake of his men and, ultimately, the world. All this without a hint of the unfortunate jingoism that has blighted the character for so long in the Marvel Universe.

The Verdict: This is streets ahead of Millar's recent work on Ultimate X-Men and The Authority, effectively mixing their "blockbuster" strengths with the depth of characterisation they lacked. Superb work. (KG)

Ultimate X-Men #14
Marvel
By Chuck Austen and God Only Knows

I have - to paraphrase Montague Withnail's favourite nephew - bought this comic by mistake. I'm enjoying Mark Millar's rendering of the X-Men and I have no wish for the title to be sullied by association with Chuck Austen in any way, shape or form. But, having avoided the previous issue, I was in a rush this week and failed to remember that I didn't want this comic.

That was remedied by page three,

Peanuts : The Art Of Charles M. Schulz

Pantheon
Edited and Designed by Chip Kidd
(Pantheon, 336 pages, hardback, $29.95)

I've loved Peanuts for as long as I can remember. Whether I was the eight year old entranced by the television cartoon, the twelve year old collecting the paperback collections or the thirty-something receiving a plush Snoopy at Christmas, I've always loved this comic strip. But sometimes, when something's been around for this long, you start to take it for granted and it becomes part of the furniture, no more special than a Dilbert cartoon, or clearing drains.

Chip Kidd, in his introduction to this wonderful book, says "When you look closer than you're supposed to at something you think you're familiar with, you're introduced to it all over again."

Last year, I started to read the syndicated reruns of classic Peanuts strips, and remembered just how funny this strip had always been.

Kidd and photographer Geoff Spear were granted unlimited access to the Peanuts archive and the collections of the Schulz family, where they spent two weeks photographing everything in painstaking detail, the result being this delightful catalogue of Schulz's career.

There's a short section at the front of the book showing photos of the artist in his formative years, with clippings from the sketchbook he kept whilst enlisted. That's followed by 11 pages of strips from Li'l Folks, widely acknowledged as a prototype Peanuts. These cartoons basically feature children in daft childish situations, but instead of being a strip, at this stage, they were just gag cartoons. They've rarely been reprinted, and are worth this outing, if only to get some idea of the processes that went into the creation of Peanuts and the gradual introduction of characters who would become regulars in the later strips.

The bulk of the book, however, is given over to reproductions of hundreds of Peanuts strips, from a variety of sources. Some of them were photographed from the originals in Schulz's archive, allowing you to see the lines in a far cleaner state than ever before. These strips, with their occasional pasted on lettering and glorious ink strokes, take you as close to the real thing as it's possible to get.

Many of the examples, however, are reproduced from Chris Ware's collection of vintage strips, clipped out of newspapers. These have been photographed directly from the copies, which means all of the imperfections attributable to age are present. As you read these strips with their tape marks, their torn edges and their inconsistent formatting, you sometimes get the feeling that you've stumbled upon a long-forgotten scrapbook, and if you wanted to, you could blow the dust from the pages.

It's no mere nostalgia fest though. Kidd is always an innovative designer, and he's never afraid to jumble up the design, by throwing in pictures of some old toys, or by letting one strip play out over four luxurious pages. The design is never allowed to overwhelm the source material, though; Kidd treats it with the respect it deserves.

Towards the end of the book there's an unfinished cartoon that was left lying near Schulz's desk. One panel has some lettering, one panel has the hint of the drawing. It's heartbreaking and you can't help but squint at it, looking for more substance in the same way you look for the end of your hand in fog. But the only answer to be found in this book is a reminder that Peanuts is one of the greatest comic strips we've ever had. Chip Kidd has written a 336 page love letter to Charles Schulz. And we're lucky to have it.

The Verdict : A beautifully produced testament to the creative genius of Charles Schulz, this is a landmark book. (SM)

SEE PAGE 64 FOR A CHANCE TO WIN THIS BOOK!

when it became more than apparent that I had bought a crap comic by accident. Now, the art is fine; I have no problem with the art, except that I don't know who drew it. I can fully understand why Marvel would prefer to leave Austen's name out of the credits of a comic, but it seems harsh to also penalise the artist in this way. Or... I don't know... maybe he asked not to be credited on a Chuck Austen comic. God knows I would...

This is Ultimate Gambit, with his funny accent and trench coat and pretty much everything else intact from the normal Gambit, apart from being written by someone who has no business writing comics in the 21st Century. Judging from some of the monkeys let loose on the character over the years, that's no compliment.

I am returning this to the comic shop next week for a full refund, with the manager's full sympathies. There's service for you.

The Verdict: I dislike having gaps in my comic collection but in this case I'm more than bloody thankful. Can Austen please go back to working in television now? Please? (AC)

X-Force #124
Marvel
By Pete Milligan and Darwyn Cooke

Well, here's a surprise! This is wonderful. That's not the surprise, of course. What *is* surprising is that this is wonderful in completely different ways from normal. Usually, writer Pete Milligan entertains the reader with a cynical stab at superheroes, celebrity, and anything else that comes his way, being highly entertaining but not to everyone's tastes.

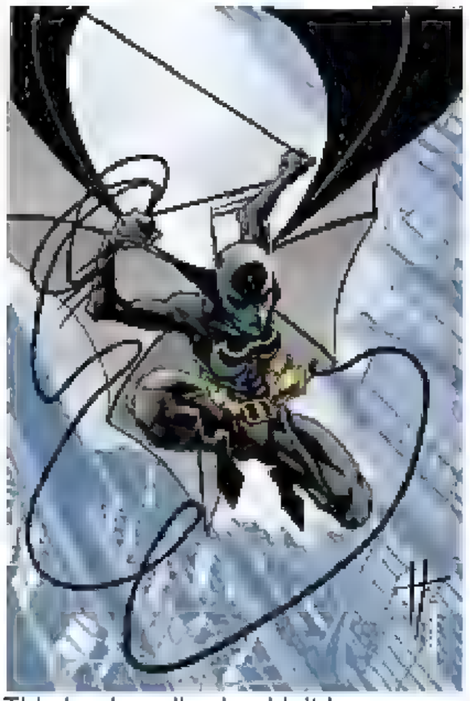
This issue, Milligan complements a new artistic direction with a new approach to this book. This issue focuses only on U-Go-Girl, Mr Sensitive/The Orphan and their developing relationship, and while it may seem a little sentimental and calculated on the surface, below it is a strong character piece that provides a refreshing change from the usual (admittedly enjoyable) cynicism. Milligan shows another facet to his sterling writing skills here, even going as far as reducing the inherent corniness of the "illegitimate birth" plotline and making it come across quite effectively. The depth of character he instils makes the development of U-Go-Girl's relationships with The Orphan and her estranged family both poignant and heart-warming.

Especially effective is the portrayal of those first tentative and clumsy steps in a romantic relationship. Catwoman's Darwyn Cooke provides "guest" art that is somehow noticeably different from Mike Allred's regular work yet pleasingly similar to it. His quirky animated style threatens to conflict with the emotional story, but instead complements it, as well as being strikingly attractive in its own right. There are some excellent choices of angle and focus in the panels, with a scene of U-Go-Girl and The Orphan holding hands being particularly strong. If the old X-Forcers can read this issue and *still* complain, then there is truly something fundamentally wrong with them.

The Verdict: No offence to Mr Allred, but this is the best issue of the revamp yet, and the best of all the new X-books so far. It's probably just the romantic in me, but this is wonderfully touching stuff. (KG)

VERDICT COLLECTED EDITION

Batgirl: A Knight Alone
DC
By Kelly Puckett, Damion Scott and others



This book really shouldn't be so good. The stories whip along at a manga-ish pace, meaning you can read the whole seven issue collection in under an hour. Dialogue is sparse, mainly because Batgirl herself has only just leaned to speak. (It's a step up from the first trade, where she couldn't talk at all!) And at first glance, the characters look like clichés - she's the tough but reformed killing machine, the villains are hush-hush government agents, there's a psychotic father figure and Lady Shiva, DC's answer to Elektra. The jaded comic book reader has seen all this before...

Except, as with the first trade, this is a hugely entertaining collection. Batgirl herself is a fascinating character - the stubborn determination of her mentor hides a more vulnerable sensitivity that peeps through the cowl when you least expect it. Kelly Puckett writes simple plots that somehow pack a really emotive punch. The artists are often left to tell the story, and do so with deceptive ease - deceptive because Damion Scott's work looks sketchy yet manages to convey deep emotions with minimal effort. You're swept along by the story, making the speed of reading a real asset.

The Verdict: Few words, big impact. Could Cassandra Cain be the most sympathetic character in the Bat Universe? (RH)

Harlequin Valentine
Dark Horse/Maverick
By Neil Gaiman & John Bolton

Based on a Gaiman short story first published in the program book of the 1999 World Horror Convention, this is a very attractive example of how to adapt existing material without losing its original flavour. Bolton essentially breaks the prose down into small chunks and then illustrates the tale in a traditional comics format, with the prose in captions and the speech in balloons, only omitting the text when his paintings make it redundant.

And the paintings are quite beautiful, with the figures drawn in a lifelike style but with the added elegance that good structural painting can bring. It looks as if Bolton has employed models for this project, but he never simply paints them as they must have appeared (a method often marring Alex Ross's work), preferring to work over the faces with the paints so that the realism remains underneath the wonderful brushwork rather than overpowering it. And it may be my imagination, but the model for the Harlequin looks to have been Grant Morrison.

The package is finely put together in a standard sized hardcover format with a spot-varnished illustration on the cover, and the interiors are printed on paper that is neither matt nor glossy but somewhere in between and shows the painting off exquisitely. For added value, the creators provide an interesting four pages on the history of the Harlequinade at the rear of the book.

At US$10.95, this is an excellent purchase. However, the copies imported into the U.K. by Titan are Dark Horse editions with a sticker over the dollar price informing you that, by Titan's reckoning, US$10.95 is equal to £9.99. Not even close, Mr Scrooge.

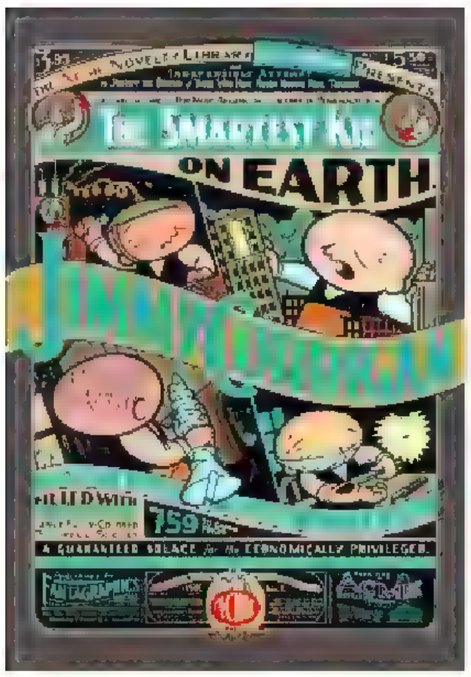
The Verdict: As an adaptation into comics this is particularly faithful to the original story; in fact, so much of the story remains that this could almost be seen as an illustrated short story as well. Either way, it's recommended. (AC)

Jimmy Corrigan:
The Smartest Kid on Earth
Pantheon Books
By Chris Ware

This is it! The book that everyone is talking about. The book that Borderline deemed worthy of *eight* pages of coverage a couple of issues ago! And, boy, if this is what the future of comics is then pass me the sleeping tablets, razor blades,

exhaust tube or noose made of pyjamas. This is the comicbook equivalent to a Leonard Cohen album, or maybe The Cure circa 1984. This really is a comic to make even the most depressed person feel a bit better about themselves.

From a design point of view, it is indeed a startling piece of work. However, it's difficult to understand for vast periods because of the way Ware flashes backwards and forwards from the past to the future as Jimmy would like it to be (or wouldn't). I can understand why many well-respected reviewers had problems with this book. What I can't understand is why they weren't praising it from the rooftops *because* they had problems with it. Surely art must push boundaries and perceptions? And if that is the case Jimmy Corrigan succeeds on all fronts. It just isn't very enjoyable. It's hard work. It leaves you feeling empty at the end of it. Maybe that's exactly what Ware set out to achieve.



It should also be noted that this isn't your common or garden comic or book. Just about every inch of it has to be read, including the folding dust jacket - in fact, I'd recommend reading the dust jacket before diving into the book itself. You just might have more of a clue and feel less threatened by it.

My main problem with Ware is that this and his other offerings in Fantagraphics' Acme Novelty Library are just soaked in self-doubt and embarrassment. If Ware is anything like his character then he must be a terribly annoying person to be around. In the end I just wanted to grab hold of Corrigan and shake him saying: "For God's sake man, pull yourself together. You are pathetic!" Somehow I don't think that was the way I was supposed to feel at the end of this.

The Verdict: You don't have to be blown away by something to realise its worth in this world. Jimmy Corrigan is probably far more important than Maus will ever be, because it doesn't have to rely on any historical hook. Therefore, I recommend this work of fiction to anyone who wants to see the comicbook as a truly worthy art medium. (DRB)

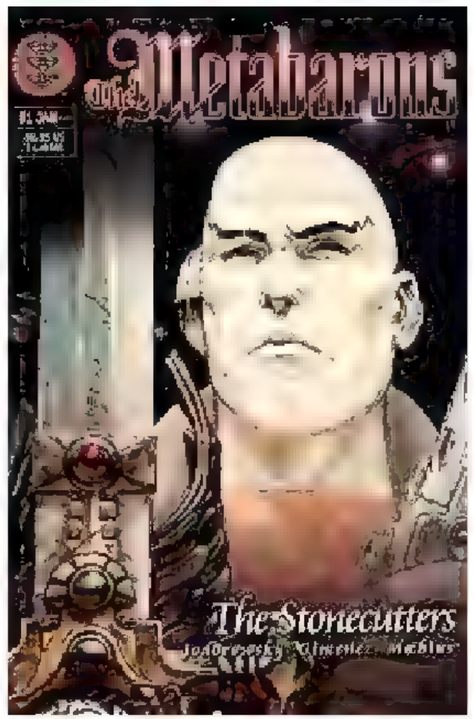
The Metabarons: Path of the Warrior and Blood and Steel
Humanoids Publishing
By Alexandro Jodorowsky and Juan Gimenez

Everybody loves surprises right? I don't mean getting carjacked at red lights or finding Michael Jackson hiding in your closet, I mean the good ones like finding money in an old jacket or discovering a movie on video; a little gem that, until you found it, you didn't even know existed.

This can happen with comic books too.

I probably became aware that comics could be about other things than guys in their pants when my brother gave me Warrior to read many moons ago. That's where I was introduced to such crazy shit as V, Miracleman, Axel and his chick. Cool stuff, fun stuff, *intelligent* stuff. The Familiar made new. Which brings me to the Metabarons.

I was primarily aware of



Alexandro Jodorowsky as the gloriously lunatic Chilean filmmaker responsible for some of the most beautifully bonkers movies I had ever seen. If you think that David Lynch operates outside of perceived normality then you haven't got a fucking clue. This guy is hardcore, man. Hardcore.

And he also writes comics.

Famously he collaborated with Moebius on The Incal, from which this epic story of honour and bloodshed originates. There are two volumes at present, Path of the Warrior which collects issues 1-5 and Blood and Steel which covers issues 6-10 of the original run, and they answer the question that a lot of people had when reading The Incal; where did the Metabaron come from?

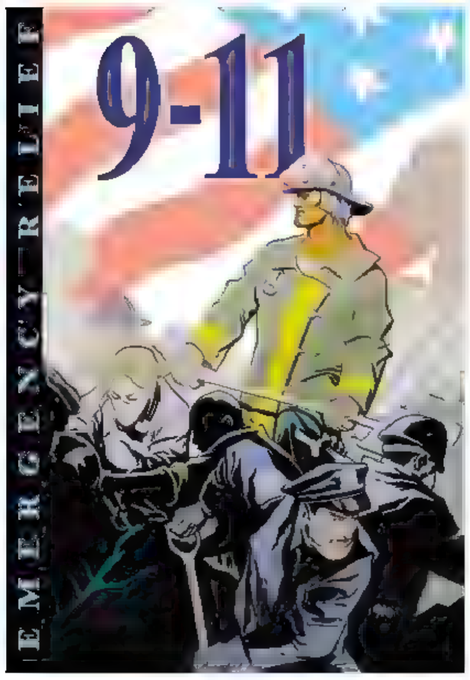
The story is galaxy spanning, epic and operatic in the truest sense of the word. I will not spoil any of the plot points with any kind of synopsis because they must be experienced cold - one of the many joys of this work is its gob-smacking revelations. The pace remains just the right side of break-neck, pretty much all the way through with Gigantic! Space! Battles! gleefully taking place within the space of two panels. Gimenez' eye splitting artwork dazzles with inventiveness, detail and a keen sense of design (his spacecraft work is just spectacular); literally, the turn of each page throws up something new and surprising. Jodorowsky handles the physical and metaphysical with an ease that makes this necessarily complex work easy to follow and yet rich with depth and subtext. It makes you think that if his famed *Dune* project had been even half as good as this, we might have been spared *The Phantom* Bloody *Menace*, as it would have been enough to make George Lucas pack up and go home.

Just one qualifying statement that I think needs to be made clear; you don't have to have any prior experience of The Incal to get the best out of this story, it works as a stand alone piece as well as a new and interesting aspect of the burgeoning "Jodoverse".

Listen, I'm not telling you any more about these fantastic collections, just get your ass down to your local comic shop and buy them. Hell, buy two and then some for your friends. If you don't then I demand you contact Mr Jodorowsky immediately and say you're sorry *at least* a hundred times.

The Verdict: Everything you've ever wanted to know about space opera but were afraid to ask. Unmissable. (PW)

9-11 Emergency Relief
Alternative Comics
By various writers and artists



This is nowhere nears as crass as I was thinking it would be and fortunately it gets the really horrible Jeff Smith bit of wise-after-the-event jingoism out of the way immediately. Still, there're some terribly maudlin stories in this, but many of them are just a bit of self-indulgent therapy, by shell-shocked Americans who haven't lived in the shadow of terrorism all their lives.

In fact, as a social commentary, this book perfectly illustrates the Americans' inability to under react to anything. The events of September 11, 2001 were quite horrendous and hopefully none of us will ever live to see such death and destruction again. The resulting heroism of the relief workers has, if nothing else, given these often abused miracle workers the respect they should have been afforded many years ago. This is a valid collection, for the stories that really *do* add gravitas and poignancy to the events of that day. It's just unfortunate that the mix is spoilt by some quite extraordinary examples of churlishness and even, in James Kochalka's truly awful offering, an example of "So what about September? Let's talk about me instead!"

The highlights of this book (and at $15.00 for over 200 pages of new material it's worth every penny or cent) are strips by Harvey Pekar and Tony Millionaire, Jen Sorensen, John Hastings, Phil Hester, Neil Vokes and possibly the best one of them all, Peter Kuper's story of what probably does go through the mind of the average New York male. It also contains what is possibly the last work of comics great Gray Morrow.

The Verdict: I'd say more than 75% of this book is worth buying. The other 25% is actually also worth buying, but for different, sociological, reasons. (DRB)

9-11 Volume #1
Chaos, Dark Horse and Image Comics
By Various Creators

Even taking into account the charity aspects of the project, this is an astonishing range of writers and artists given the price of US$9.95. This volume of 9-11 features an array of creators largely from outside the mainstream of American comics and, as such, serves also as a taster for the more independent work available within the industry.

Some of my favourite pieces within it are stories that are actually unrelated to the actual events of September 11. Maybe it's because, as hideous as the concept may be, there has now been a peaking of emotion on the subject, after which every new story fails to touch in the same way as a desensitisation of the spirit sets in. Maybe, after reading some of the stories in this volume, that effect is exacerbated and any story offering something new - or different - is welcomed.

Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie, Bob Harris & Gregory Ruth, William Stout, Dave Cooper and Roger Langridge offer the best work here, for my money. Interestingly, there are a number of single page illustrations that manage to pack a lot of sentiment and feeling into one image, achieving more than others who spread out over multiple pages. These include Steve Guarracia, Mike Getsiv, Alex Maleev and Dawn Brown, all contributing sensitive and reasoned pictures that effectively convey a thousand words.

One thing sticks in the craw: Frank Miller pissing in the picnic basket with as unfeeling a piece of commentary as I've seen in a long while, preferring to make a hard man statement with little thought for those who may actually be taking comfort in the perceived safety of God and Country.

The Verdict: Heartfelt work of charity and/or bargain collection of work by leading lights of the industry. Pay your money and take your choice. (AC)

9-11 Volume #2
DC
By various creators

Oddly enough, while there are more stories in this second volume that qualify as mere twaddle, it probably contains slightly more stories of out-and-out quality than its companion issue. Most of us are going to buy both books, so it's a moot point, but an observation all the same.

This book features contributions from the more mainstream creators of comics, many of them from DC and Marvel, giving a more unified flavour to the tone, although many of these same creators do seem to miss the mark with their use of superheroes and other tropes.

I really admired Gaiman and Bachalo's *Death and Destruction* story, which worked the Endless into a real world event neatly and without mawkishness, and managed to

wring yet more emotion out of a deteriorating subject. Much the same could be said of Brubaker and Lark's *Scene of the Crime* story. There are a couple of one page strips by Darwyn Cooke and Tim Sale respectively that stand out as examples of brevity, and Colleen Doran and Phil Noto contribute some of the most effective illustrations, Doran's being particularly resonant.

For me, though, this issue is marred by the jingoistic arrogance of Neal Adams's piece, a nice enough picture marred by sentiment that I - even as opposed to censorship as I am - would simply have omitted from the book.

The Verdict: Heartfelt work of charity and/or bargain collection of work by leading lights of the industry. Pay your money and take your choice. (AC)

Publishers – send your books and trades to BORDERLINE, 45 Fullingdale Road, Northampton, NN3 2PZ England

UNSEEN

Bulldog Adventure Magazine #3
£2.00 including P+P from Jason Cobley, 94 Elm Road, Wisbech, Cambs PE13 2TB, England

This is always a bit of fun. Regardless of the quality of the artwork, Cobley always manages to inject a real sense of Britishness into it, and in that time-honoured English tradition of being able to do it with tongue stuck firmly in cheek.

For those not familiar with this long running British small press character (this is actually the 21st issue of Winston Bulldog's adventures), it's the story of an alternative earth where some animals and vegetables have evolved at the same rate as human beings. While there is an uneasy alliance between humans and their animal, vegetable and mineral allies, there's that underlying X-Men-ish angst permeating it throughout – although it doesn't take itself anywhere as seriously as the X-Men does.

There're 36-pages of strips, a bit of editorialising by Cobley (always entertaining) and a classic *Bulldog* strip at the back. But, if nothing else, that reprint makes you wonder why the visual standard of today's BAM strips isn't up to the calibre of the good old days...

The Verdict: Would it be a cop-out if I said this was well worth spending a couple of quid on? (DRB)

Konky Kru
£1.95 from Andy, P.O. Box 8892, London SW15, England

Andy has been concentrating on sketching and illustration recently (see the Angoulême report elsewhere in this issue!), but he's now taken the time to put out his first comic in some years. While his illustrative style involves much rendering and shadow effects, his strips are almost *ligne claire*, presenting simple, wordless gags with a minimum of drawing but a maximum of expertise. His comics are almost a classic example of something that looks easy to do but is actually pretty hard – without benefit of rendering, dialogue or even facial expression he manages to invest his gags with a quantity of emotional weight, and of narrative clarity, which can only be achieved by putting every single line in exactly the right place. And he doesn't trip up even once in this slim, printed volume.

The Verdict: A delightful evocation of slapstick which demonstrates how quantity is so much less significant than quality. (MK)

The O Men #13
£1 from Martin Eden, 35 Woodbury Street, Tooting, London SW17 9RP, England

This issue starts off with a deliciously devious plot twist that should have been obvious to the observant reader (i.e. not me!) and that, by not being so obvious, shows that Martin Eden is a truly skilled writer. The comic then swiftly moves into plot explanation mode and throws a great big chunk of exposition at the reader, which, through clever scene changes, never once becomes dull or forced. Much of the history of Anathema and the UK Ultra Knights is revealed, but Eden leaves the reader with a number of niggling questions to complement the fine array of answers they have just been handed. More proof of the quality of the writing is evident in the fact that questions arising from this issue are not due to plot holes, but actually arise from developments in the plot.

Anathema's hideous level of power, hitherto hinted at but not seen, is unveiled to impressive effect, and the O Men are shown to be somewhat worryingly powerless and clueless. A truly sad feeling is effectively conveyed at the issue's climax, as we see how withered and pathetic a figure the once-mighty Union Jack has become. The implication that the greatest weapon our heroes could call against Anathema was actually destroyed by one of their own number, even before Anathema's arrival, is a discomfiting one, and points this title into interesting territory.

The art is nicely done again, with more of Eden's imaginative layouts and compositions. The cover is superb, and there is the usual handful of truly wonderful panels throughout the comic itself (the panel where Grace uses her powers to track Anathema is beautiful yet simple). An interesting use of shifting viewpoints, pacing and panel layouts makes one climactic scene very enjoyable. Union Jack, a character that Eden has had problems drawing effectively in the past, is portrayed very well here in a number of flashback scenes. Finally the character radiates the sense of power that he is supposed to have but has previously lacked.

Combining this artistic improvement with the issue's plot, Eden makes the story's central irony all the more effective. Superb superheroics yet again.

The Verdict: This is easily the equal of Morrison's New X-Men or Milligan's X-Force. An essential purchase, if ever there was one. (KG)

Top Notch Tosh #6
£1 from Andrew Lewis, 39 Priory Court, Bryncoch, Neath, West Glamorgan SQ10 7RZ, UK

While this series is generally a literate, sharply delineated and witty SF title, Lewis occasionally ventures out into some experimentation. This time his regular characters Baldy and Maud, intergalactic vendors of highly dodgy fast food are recast as the protagonists in a telling of Keats' La Belle Dame Sans Merci - why, I have no idea, but the result is simultaneously amusing and laden with pathos. *Roboman* falls closer to the title's usual territory, being a hard edged little tale about human discrimination against robots; Matt Brown's art has some fine moments, although it may on the whole be a little too scratchy and thin lined. Best of all, though, is a central section that isn't actually comics, at least according to the pictorial definition, but consists of small prose nuggets dealing with love, loss, aging and passion, in styles ranging from diary entry to stream of consciousness but cohering into a slightly bitter overall picture of humans and inhumanity. Still, perhaps the simple reversal of tradition in the cover image will give you the best possible idea of the simplicity but depth in this unassuming little pamphlet.

The Verdict: Of course it's all tosh, but the quality is certainly very high. (MK)

BEAUTIFUL LOSERS

If they were CDs, they'd be the last two XTC albums; if they were films, they'd be Shiner or perhaps something by David Mamet. Lionised by the critics, loved by a small hardcore of fans, completely ignored by everybody else. In the first of an occasional series, we begin to look at comics series which should've done far better than they did and which vanished far too quickly. These, then, are the Beautiful Losers.

FIFTEEN years ago. It had been a while since the twin **Houses of Mystery** and **Secrets** closed their doors, and ever since those particular shutters had gone up, the prevalent wisdom was: Anthologies – Especially Horror Anthologies - Don't Sell. Mike Gold was given the job of disproving this; the book he tried to do it with was called **Wasteland**.

Gold chose to ignore many conventions of the anthology: there was to be a regular creative team, there was no Cryptkeeper-style 'horror host' and the editorial mission was not to jump out and go 'Boo!' but rather, to quote Gold, to 'crawl inside the reader's head and kick the icky nasty thoughts loose.'

The writers of the series had worked with Gold at First Comics: John Ostrander has since become a familiar name in comics, and at that time was probably best known for his runs on **Suicide Squad** and **Firestorm The Nuclear Man**, neither of which were any preparation for what was to come in **Wasteland**. Del Close *(below, left)*, Ostrander's collaborator, was a writer, an actor, a circus performer, a theatrical director and a witch. They worked with a team of four artists; one would illustrate each of an issue's three stories while the fourth provided the cover. The initial team were Don Simpson, who was and still is known for his **Megaton Man** series; George Freeman, creator of **Captain Canuck**; William Messner-Loebs, who at that time was known mostly for his remarkable series **Journey**; and a pre-**V For Vendetta** (as far as America was concerned) David Lloyd.

But was this 'experiment in internal horror' any good? To be

WELL!
DEFENSE ATTORNEY ALLEGED LORD ARCHON IS HIGHLY PRONE TO HURT TO KILL A RABBIT OUT OF HIS BATHTUB IF HE WANTS TO WIN THIS ONE

honest, the first issue, especially looked at today, is a little weak. Freeman's cover, using a format designed by Richard Bruning – the logo and credits in a black frame around the top and left of the main image – sets a trend that was followed in the following three issues, with alien imagery striving for an air of otherness that didn't quite come off. Inside, there was one slightly unnerving story about drugs (among other things), one unfunny science fiction tale (which became the main selling point of the book for a while) and the first of Close's autobiographical stories involving hallucinations in a sewer.

The second issue was where things started to get interesting. Another chunk of Close's life story, a twist-ending piss-take of Shirley MacLaine – this was the Eighties, remember – and a quiet little thing illustrated by David Lloyd, concerning a small boy telling child welfare workers that his step-father was a werewolf. The welfare workers talk to the boy and his family, and everything ends happily. Then, right at the end, one small caption; "One month later, the boy was dead.' No explanation or reason, just the reader left to wonder.

And from there, it flew. Issue three contained a story that satirised Harvey Pekar while discussing the nature of fear, and two absolutely cracking jobs by Lloyd and Freeman. #4 ruminated on success and failure throughout its four stories, including a murder/suicide set to Sonnet LXVI. Number five had 'guest appearances' from **Swamp Thing**, **Doctor Fate** and **Wonder Woman**, and had #6's cover. A few weeks later, #5 reappeared with its own cover. #6 – The Real Number Six – had a plain white cover so as not to unbalance the rotation of the artistic squad.

Despite these shenanigans, the creative quality of the book improved by the month. At a time when DC were pushing such new titles as **Power Of The Atom**, **Action Comics Weekly** and **The Wanderers**, Ostrander and Close were taking on relationship breakdowns, Dickian solipsism, syphilis, the primal urge to reproduce, and the eternal question of whether God is full of shit. They were producing work the likes of which would have out-Vertigo'd Vertigo before Vertigo had been even thought of (as a rough guide, Grant Morrison's first issue of **Animal Man** coincided with **Wasteland** #9, as did the first issue of DC's repackaged **V For Vendetta**).

George Freeman left; Timothy Truman came in for a short run, as did Ty Templeton, whose 'Dissecting Mr. Fleming' was a small masterpiece. Messner-Loebs and Lloyd left; they were replaced by Bill Wray and the legendary Joe Orlando. The stories they illustrated took on greater themes: love, personal responsibility, existential loneliness.

It failed, of course. Or, possibly, it succeeded. One of **Wasteland**'s aims was to up the ante every issue, pushing its readers harder and harder until it could push no further within the bounds of a DC-published comicbook. Gold, Ostrander and Close expected to lose readers every issue, and expected **Wasteland** to last no more than eight issues. It eventually lasted eighteen.

The final issue featured a cover depicting necrophilia (or did it?), the only full-length story to appear in the title, and ended as the first issue had begun, with a man deciding whether or not to ingest a toxic narcotic.

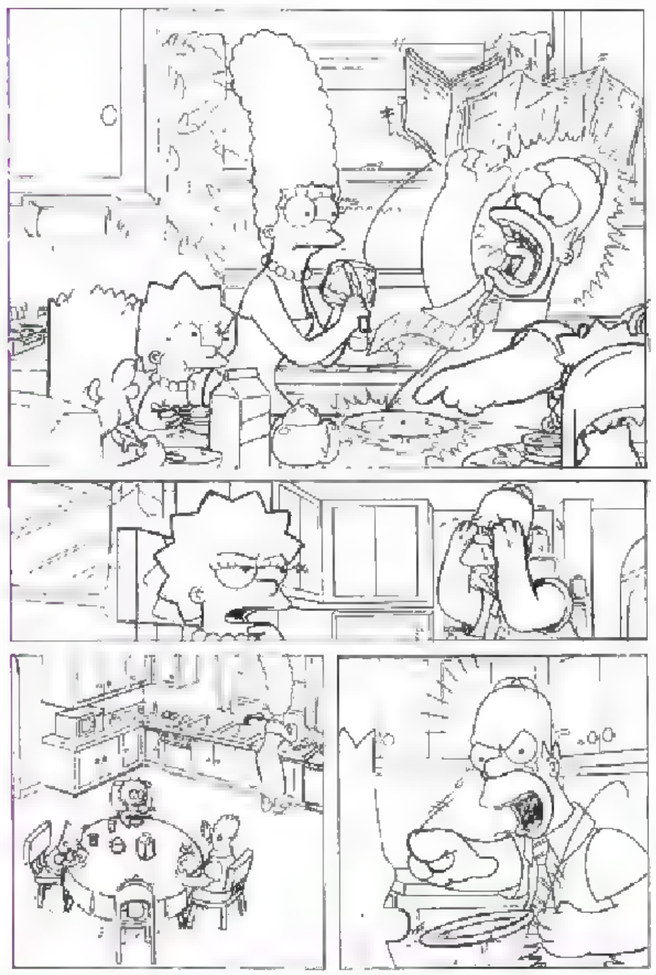
Anthologies – especially horror anthologies - still don't sell. In 1999, DC's Vertigo imprint launched **Flinch**: it lasted sixteen issues. *Martin Shipp* BL

YOUNG GUNS

It's not age but talent that determines tomorrow's stars today, this month: Mike Worley

IN 1983 Mike Worley was a runner-up in the Comics Buyers' Guide's 500th issue contest, "Create Your Own Characters," with his own super group, The Amazing Eight! In 1984, Mike was a runner-up as a penciler in the Great Marvel Tryout Contest - always a bridesmaid, never a bride.

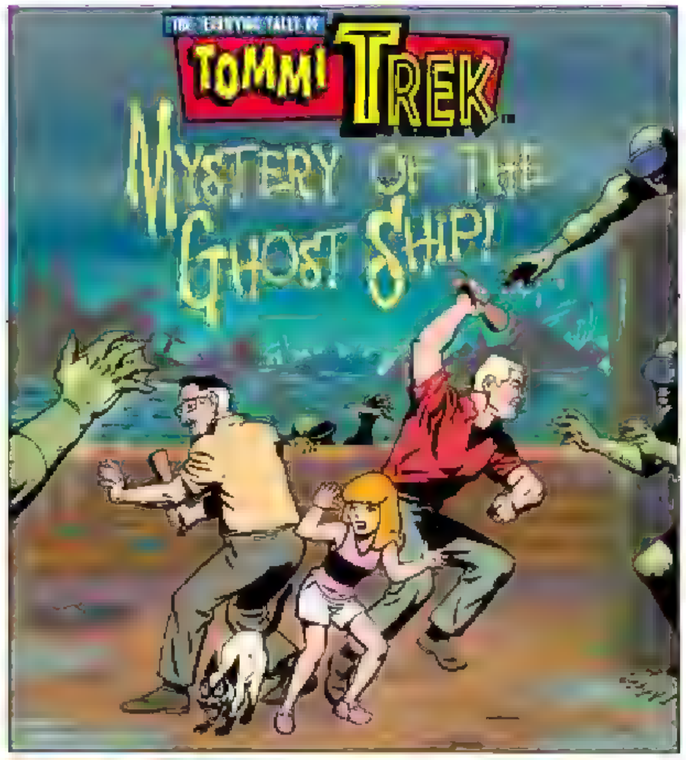
Mike broke into the industry in 1985 as a colorist, first assisting Phil DeWalt on some jobs for Eclipse Comics, and then on his own for Eclipse and Hero Graphics. His first penciling jobs were for Archie Comics, doing some gag pages, mostly with Betty and Jughead. During this time, Mike did some lettering for Malibu and started doing some coloring for Marvel on such titles as Barbie, Barbie Fashion, William Shatner's Tekworld, Mad Dog, Kid 'n' Pay and Midnight Sons Unlimited, also some inking for Marvel Comics Presents and Midnight Sons Unlimited. During this time, he also did some penciling for Ren and Stimpy, and inked the style guide for the King Features property, Phantom 2040.

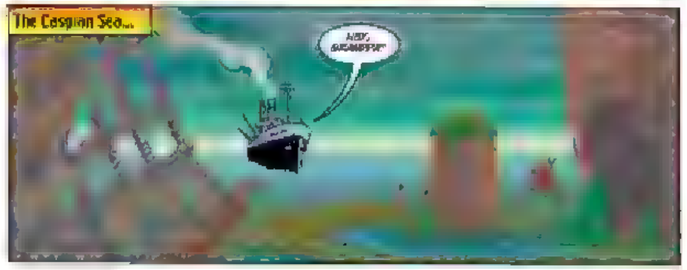


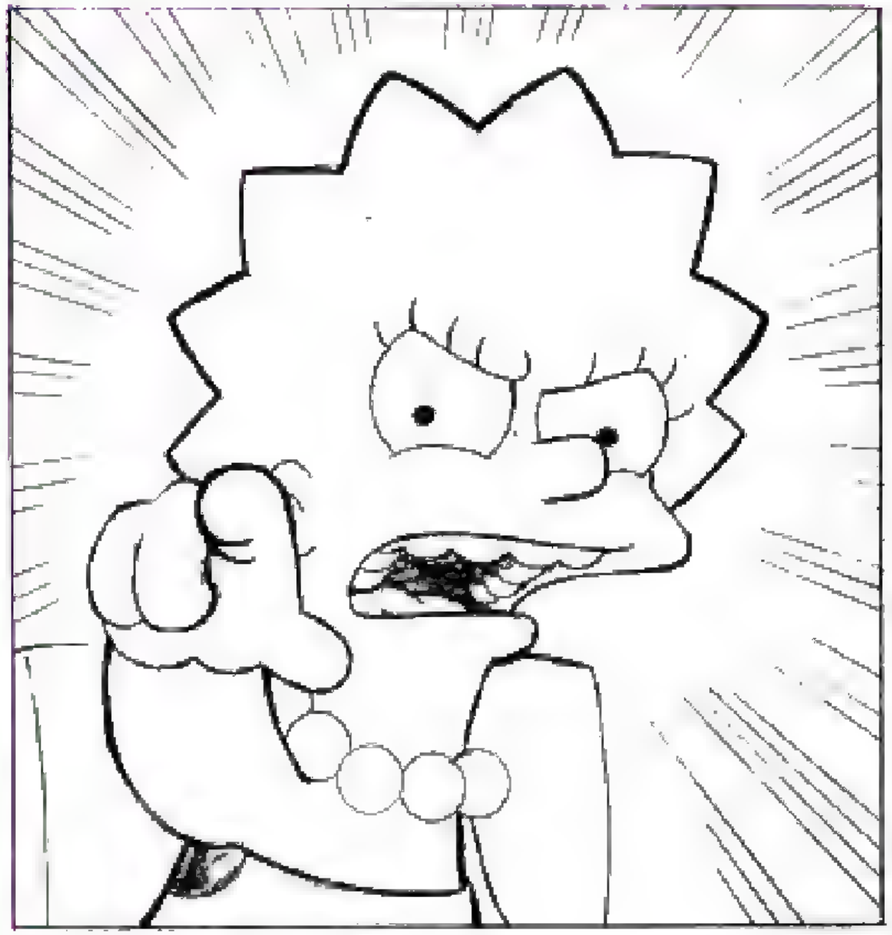
Just as things looked rosy in the mid-90s, with Mike scheduled to be the inker on a Dumb and Dumber comic based on the cartoon, Marvel suffered the first of their economic woes and cutbacks. The licensed properties department and many editors were let go, ergo so was Mike. It was not the best of times to be a comic book artist.

In 1996 Mike did the art for a project written by Phil Hester, titled The Picture Taker. He also made contact with Big Bang Comics, starting to get some scripts from them in 1998. Mike also joined with HiFi colour design, to do inking on a new project from New Breed Comics called Tohubohu, a futuristic comic book set in the post-apocalyptic future where man is now the bottom of the evolutionary food chain.

Mike joined HiFi full-time in 1999, working on a variety of projects for various publishers including Marvel, Dark Horse, Crusade Entertainment, King Features, Awesome Entertainment, Abstract Studios, Double Eye Studios, and Image Comics, mostly doing computer coloring,







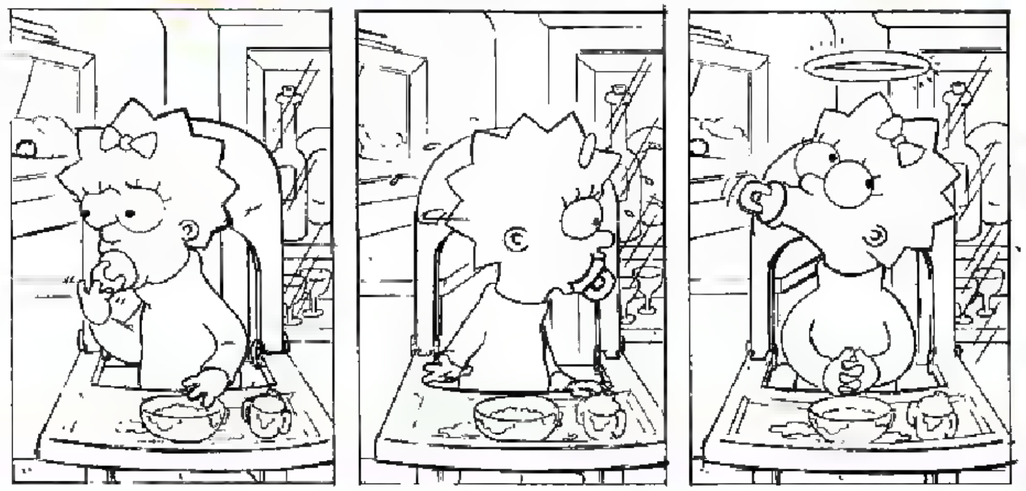
MAKE A WISH, VERONICA
MY COMICS ARE LIKE ARCHIE
I ALREADY HAVE EVERYTHING I COULD POSSIBLY WISH FOR!
OH, SECOND THOUGHT, THERE IS SOMETHING I COULD WISH FOR

PLUS: A GREAT ADVENTURE!
BIG BANG COMICS
Image
31 APRIL
$3.95
KNIGHT WATCHMAN'S DEAD! SNIFF! AND I'M ALL ALONE NOW IN THIS STRANGE LAND!
DON'T CRY GALAHAD! IT IS MY FAULT... SOB! HE DIED!
"DOOM in DIMENSION XI"

lettering and post production work. He also caught the attention of Bongo Comics, the publishing arm of the *Simpsons* empire.

HiFi moved to Arizona in early 2001, but Mike opted not to go with them and has been freelancing again as a penciler, inker, and letterer, mostly for Bongo but also some other smaller publishers, including Vault of Mysterious Crates and Psyco-Path for Fiction House Entertainment, a project with the working title Atonement, and Tommi Trek, a homage to the Saturday morning cartoons of the 60s, for Funk-O-Tron. And since 1996 he has been working on a project with Borderline editor Phil Hall – a project so secret both of them have almost completely forgotten about it!

BL



THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE, WE JUST IGNORE IT

To paraphrase a UK TV programme's most famous line, "This is a local hobby, for local people. We'll have no trouble here..." Except it isn't a joke – you can't treat comicbook celebrities with the same irreverance as a TV or pop star. Phil Hall asks why...

Visuals: Joe Sacco's cover to the TCJ Winter Special – innovative US comics publishing; Arena – a mens' magazine; A Norman Rockwell painting; The Savage Dragon; Erik Larsen; X-Men #1E wraparound; the Monkey cover to Loaded #100; a cover to an old issue of Comics International; Posh & Becks – subjects of unparalleled media intrusion; Grant Morrison, who doesn't eat kittens' brains (yet); some kittens exercising before going to Grant's house; A fine Scottish hotel; a monkey.

HEARD the one about the comicbook artist who hacked his girlfriend up and put her in garbage bags for the refuse collectors? What about the writer who got arrested for beating his wife up repeatedly? Remember reading about the famous comics artist who was sentenced to two years in prison for embezzlement? Or how about the top Seventies artist who found his wife in bed with a copper, then proceeded to beat the police officer to death with his motorcycle helmet and subsequently fled the crime scene to spend four years on the road fleeing for his life (only to find out he faced no charges)? The answer to all of those questions will be 'no'. In fact, we rarely hear anything about the celebrities in our industry - as far as the rest of the world is concerned (if indeed they are remotely concerned) the comics industry's creators all come from Dullsville...

The thing is, celebrities in this industry *do* have lives - and many of them have very colourful lives. During my years as a top gossip columnist in comics, I learned that what the Brits and Europeans lapped up, the Americans hated. When I pitched the idea of *Movers & Shakers* to Dez Skinn at Comics International it was with Nigel Dempster crossed with Rick Sky (both renowned in the past for being the juiciest of gossipmongers) in mind. The very first column featured a humorous little story about a then up-and-coming artist and his predilection for schoolgirls.

We received four letters of complaint from the United States! Both Dez and I realised that even though comic creators had some funny and revelatory stories to be told about them, they weren't seen as "celebrities" in the Posh Spice or David Beckham sense of the word. It didn't matter how much adulation they received from their enthusiastic public; that enthusiastic public wasn't even prepared to accept that their idols go to the toilet like the rest of us, so they weren't going to believe that they were into under-age group sex parties, or were practicing black magicians or were involved in homosexual orgies in seedy Scottish hotels!

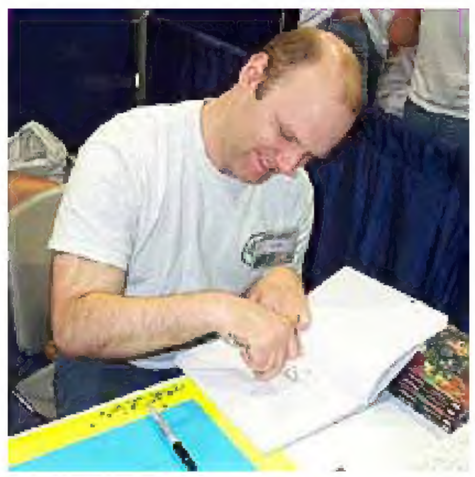
American comicbooks and the industry that produces them have changed enormously during the last forty years. Before then they trundled along at their own pace. Then, as more and more networks of fandom appeared, so did change. Before long, people all over the US and UK started to set up their own fanzines - and the previously untouchable comic creators began to become less... untouchable. However, they were still the stars. They still received the adulation and hero worship that pop and movie stars were afforded, albeit in a far more subdued and relaxed manner - comics fandom and its treatment of its heroes was and still is very stoic. The reason for this is that it's all been a very parochial business for as long as anyone can remember. We're all friends here. Aren't we?

Not in a million years.

It would be perfectly understandable if creators

afforded fans the same kind of respect they themselves have been getting ever since Jack Kirby went to his first comics convention. But that doesn't happen. You see, on the whole comics creators, especially the successful ones, actually *do* think of themselves as stars, and in our own little cottage industry we have A list stars, B list stars, C list stars and the D list, the has-beens, the never-beens and the wannabes.

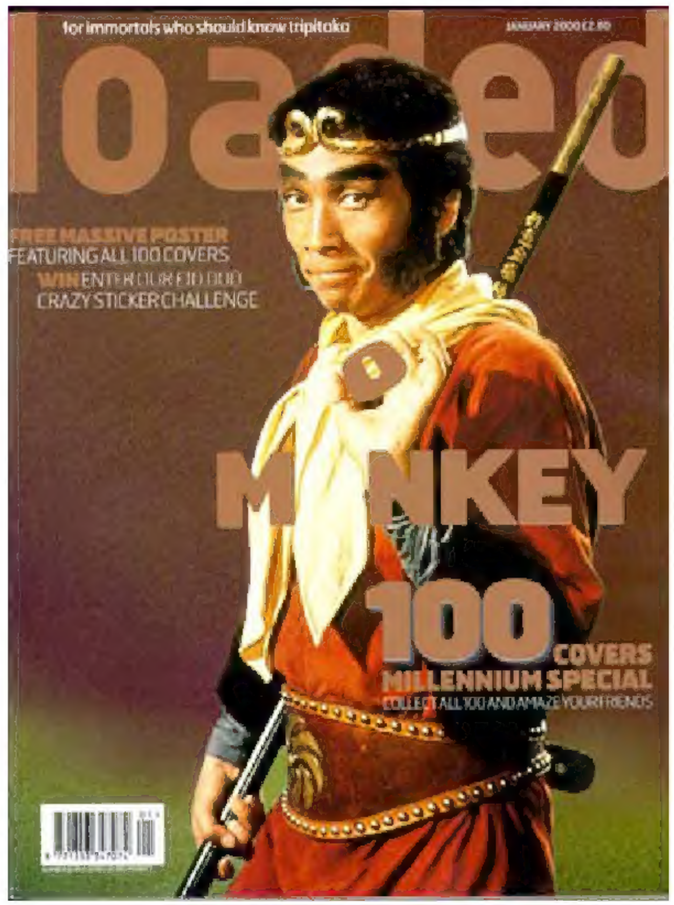
Using a rule of thumb, A list people would probably include anyone who's currently working on a hot Top 20 book (and/or who is classed by the comics press as being hip). These would include Brian Michael Bendis, either of the Kubert brothers, Grant Morrison - it will also include the veterans who still have street cred, such as Alan Moore, Frank Miller, Neil



Gaiman, maybe George Perez. The B list is generally going to be creators of Top 21-50 books, plus a smattering of veterans with lesser street cred. C list celebrities will be working on anything outside of the Top 50, but still be a known "name". Erik Larsen probably fits nicely into this category, both on his current industry standing and because the Savage Dragon creator has been around the industry long enough to gain *some* longevity points. D list... well, if you're on the D list you're either unheard of, an alternative creator with a small but select fan club, or John Byrne. Either way, you need a boost into one of the other lists or you're about to become as well known as such luminaries as John Warner, Jose Delbo and Joey Cavalieri. The only thing that binds a bottom of the D list creator with a top of the A list creator is that many of them are hoisted on their own petard.

"I'm as good as Jm Lee. Why aren't I getting the plum jobs?" This was said to me, completely genuinely, by a comics artist in 1991. The sad truth was that he was neither as good as Jm Lee, nor worthy of working in professional comics – but he'd just come off a successful eight issue run on a certain comic and believed that he was the main reason for the comic's success. Interestingly, I spoke to the writer of that comic a few years later and he believed that the run's success was *his* responsibility... and he too couldn't understand why he hadn't walked into a top job with Marvel or DC.

Now, of course this isn't the case most of the time. The best part of the comics celebrities I've met over the last 25 years have been normal people who treat the writing and drawing of comics as a job, not a path to adulation and public glory. But there are some who just stroll around behaving as though God hirself deems them far superior to the rest of the world. You know the sort of person... or perhaps you don't... The kind of comics creator I'm talking about here is the kind that tells the very last person, a 12 year-old kid, in the line at a signing that he's "shit out of luck sonny, better catch up with me at my next signing... in ten fucking years!"



Or the celebrity who fired off a series of letters to a comics magazine when it accidentally credited him incorrectly for something, in a tone which suggested he'd been accused of being a paedophile in public. Or the same creator, who has, to my knowledge, asked for at least three public apologies from magazines because he believed they were being subjective (read negative) in their coverage of him. Allegedly, there was the well-known writer who was accused of getting her job because of who she was sleeping with rather than how good she was - the unfortunate editor she slept with has been rigidly defending his position ever since, as vocally and embarrassingly as he can. And there are the creators who use the industry's auxiliary staff to further careers and then casually discard these people as if they were yesterday's

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trash. And the creators who constantly harp on – in private, of course - about what a "sad bunch of wankers" their fans are and how they "don't actually like being in the same room as the fans, mainly because of the smell of urine and stale semen"…

The irony for me is that while the industry is arguably morally correct in keeping its stars guarded from the public glare of unwanted publicity, they also expect the *extra*, often more proactive, protection blindly given by their fans. Comics fans are very protective of their heroes - not just the spandex heroes, but the heroes in the creative seats. And so they should be, because 90% of them are hardworking professionals. But why should the other 10% be given the same rights? Why shouldn't magazines like Borderline or The Comics Journal or even Comics International report on some of the more interesting, salacious and intriguing titbits about the industry? It's a freedom of speech issue - of the kind that Americans are rightly proud of but their comics industry is unfortunately selective about. Freedom of speech is great as long as it doesn't offend; but if it does offend then let's kick, scream, and worry about the consequences afterwards. To put it another way - if you're not nice to us all the time, we won't play with you.

This may be connected to another theme running through recent issues of Borderline, the overwhelming belief in the US industry that it is the be-all and end-all of comics, when in fact it isn't. The people dedicated to US comics can be just like zealots, insisting that theirs is the only true god and all others are false idols, or even nonexistent! If this were Jhad, US comics would either be cowering in a cave somewhere or would be fighting and falling and complaining about how unfair the rest of the world is being to them. Of course, this analogy only applies to those who read this and know exactly what I'm driving at, and are offended or annoyed by it. If you read the above and get on with your life, then you're one of the good things about the industry. If you read the above and are currently drafting a letter of complaint to your congressman, senator, president, or CEO of Marvel, then you really need to get a life.

If Grant Morrison, as one of the most popular writers in comics at the moment, is involved in anything remotely controversial outside comics, then by rights it should be interesting to some people. Like those who won't watch certain TV programmes, you can just switch off or turn the page – no-one is being forced to read that Grant likes to eat live kittens' brains (he doesn't, by the way). But neither should anyone be forced to buy only a pretty picture that airbrushes over any and all warts. If that bothers you, perhaps you should find something less stressful to be a fan of - WWF, say. The same applies if someone uses Grant Morrison out of context to illustrate another point. If the point is strong enough, it matters that it should be made; and if it is made with an analogy that uses a person or people in the public eye, they're being used because readers will be better able to better identify and relate to the point being made.

You want to talk about celebrity weddings? Posh and Becks are your targets. You want to show that a person is a damned good writer? You put their work up against that of someone identifiable.

The bottom line is that the US industry (and we can't use anyone else here, because it's the US's problem) really doesn't like people rocking its lovely, idyllic boat. We fans and commentators must revere our comics creators, treat them with kid gloves, ignore their transgressions, paint Norman Rockwell-type images of how wholesome and full of family values they are (even if they are seen out the back of a convention centre looking for some sexual expressionism).

Why should comics be dragged down to the level of those awful UK tabloid newspapers or lads' magazines? Because maybe if we're seen taking them less seriously they'll get treated with a little more seriousness.

BL

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WORLD OF HEROS

Chris Spicer & Rebecca Bonser are on holiday, so this month we have a guest presenter – his name is Guest Presenter...

Marvel invests profits on "bling bling" for its new "posse" – Jemas told 'Yo is phat!'

X-Rated comics from the Whore-House of Ideas!

HOT on the heels of the successful anal sex scene in **Alias #1**, Marvel is allegedly contemplating a number of 18 certificate comics featuring everyone's favourite superheroes.

"This isn't just an excuse to do Reed and Sue Richards explore the **Kama Sutra**," explained Marvel's Bill Rosemann. "We accept that sex is an important part of life - our advisers have confirmed that sex is an important part of life - and we at Marvel are determined to bring more sex into your lives."

The initial three titles in the new Marvel Sex imprint will be: **Slippery When Wet** - Hey True Believers, you know how sexually charged Namor is! You know how hot Namorita can get! You might not know that Namora was a real go-er. This new ongoing series explores the sex life of those erotically charged undersea dwellers. In the first issue Prince Namor gets it on with Sue Richards in a scene you never thought you'd sea! This book will appeal to gay Marvelites as well as all you heterosexual Marvelites!

Fantastic Four-Play - "OK, we lied, you *do* want to see the sexual athleticism of Reed and Sue. But you also want to see that hot-headed (in more ways than one) Johnny Storm lighting the blue touch paper of female sexuality. You'd also like to see how Ben has sex and, in an extra feature called Reed's Sex Secrets, just what his and Ben's sperm looks like under the microscope."

And the last book is **SeX Factor** - "What is going to set the world on fire? Rogue with her tits out, that's what. Or how about a bit of Jean Grey poon-tang? Some Mystique batty? In this sexually explicit **X-Men** miniseries, the team of frustrated mutants faces the terror from beyond the stars that is Muff Diver and her Sexecutioners".

Marvel has a number of other titles planned, depending on how well this pack of three sells. Other planned comics include: **Double Shot**, **Captain Marvel**, **Iron Man**, and **Giant-Sized Man-Thing**. We were going to ask Marvel's head of Special Projects for details of these, but couldn't find anyone answering to that title.

Late News – New Marvel X-Rated line runs into printer problems

AS we were going to press we heard that Marvel's regular printers have apparently refused to touch the new line of sexy superhero comics we described over there to the left. We asked Marvel's head-hyper Bill *(Everything is Beautiful)* Rosemann if he could confirm this. He told us, "We're looking very seriously at a fantastic new concept which is going to revolutionise the world of comics – colour photocopying! OK, so it raises the printing costs a little, but we know how much you want these red hot books so we're certain that our planned, highly limited edition print runs on 80gsm A4 copier paper, at only $10.00 dollars per issue, will be a sell out!"

We then asked if he'd ever heard of "small press" but he declined to comment. However, Bill Jemas said this, "Look you snivelling little shits, how many times have I told you to stop rummaging through my garbage?"

Dark Horse Makes Another Big Announcement – Buffy versus Star Wars comic is on. Aliens to guest star!

DC considers giving up comics in favour of bucket fetish magazines

IN an incredible admission by DC's new head of everything that moves, Paul Levitz (left), the 67 year old chief executive admitted that DC had a confession to make.

"Yes, it's true, we have to tell our readers and fans something and it could have far reaching consequences as far as our remaining comics are concerned." When pressed for something more definitive, Levitz continued, "Have I ever told you about my love of buckets? I think they're really wonderful and you can use them for so much more than just carrying water. Do you know I attended an entire convention wearing a bucket on my head? It didn't make a blind bit of difference, everyone still knew who I was and I think wearing the bucket allowed me to get far more business deals done than you would normally imagine me doing. In fact, would you like to come back to my house and see my extensive bucket collection? It's very nice, I have a big pink one too."

We beat a hasty retreat, managed to track down outgoing CEO Jenette Kahn and asked her about the impending changes at DC. She declined to talk to us. But her secretary said, "If Jen hears another bucket get mentioned she's going to drill some holes. Do you understand?" We didn't but felt perhaps we needed to talk to someone a bit more hands on.

However, this is DC, and finding anyone who actually wants to talk about anything is pretty hard. We sent emails to the Direct Market department - in reply we received an MP3 file of the sound of tumbleweed sweeping majestically across the New Mexican deserts.

We finally managed to locate Carmine Infantino in a remote old folks home in Nebraska (although we have since been informed that this is Carmine Infantino the former sausage seller from Springfield, Missouri and not the former Flash artist and editor in chief of DC Comics). He said, "Heh, that Levitz... the things he keeps in his buckets... sometimes they're sticky, sometimes they're soft, but all the time they're something you wouldn't show to your mother. He put me here you know!"

Lack of funny looking animals in March's Borderline means magazine may lose WWF support. The Rock threatens boycott.

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HOLD THE BACK PAGE

SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

Actor/director
Lionel Jeffries
and
comics writer
Jeph Loeb

Veteran comics writer
Steve Gerber
and veteran comics
journalist
Mike Conroy

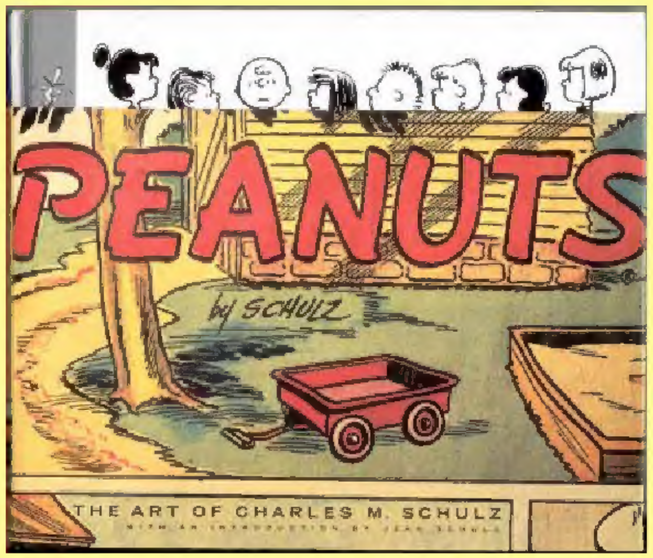
send your photos & suggestions to Borderline editorial

BORDERLINE IS FREE

But the people who put it together need to be reminded that they're important. Don't forget to stop off at the web page and donate some money via PayPal. Thanks - the more you can spare the longer we can last!

WIN WIN WIN WIN WIN WIN

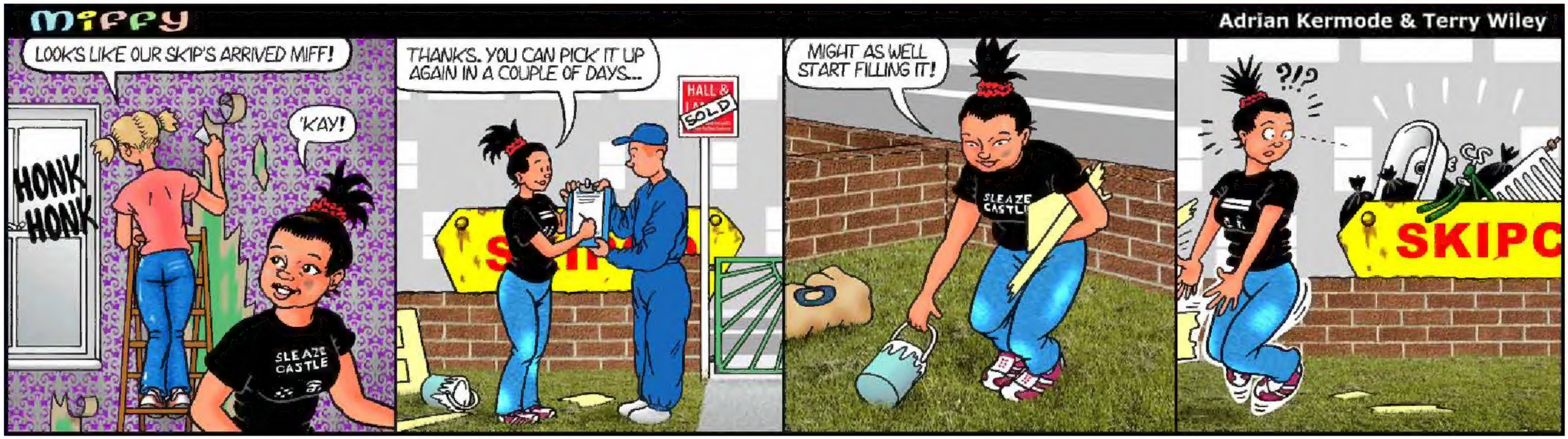
In association with Pantheon Books (a division of Random House), Borderline is giving away 12 copies worth over $300 of
PEANUTS: THE ART OF CHARLES M. SCHULZ EDITED BY CHIP KIDD



To win one of these fine hardback editions, all you have to do is complete the small market research questionnaire below and answer the simple question. Send an e-mail to *editorial@borderline.mediahall.co.uk* with Peanuts in the subject header and your answers numerically, plus your name, age and full postal address.

1. What other comics magazines do you buy?
2. Would you buy Borderline if it was a printed magazine?
3. How much would you be prepared to pay for a magazine like Borderline?
4. What is your favourite part of Borderline?
5. What is your least favourite part of Borderline?
6. What is the name of Charlie Brown's dog?

Closing date for this competition is April 15th. Books are in-house so will be despatched 3 days after the release of ***Borderline*** *#10 (May edition). E-mail or postal applications only. Mailing address is on page 2.*



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